

Wilfrid Laurier University

## Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

---

1992

### Mothers and Others Making Change: Empowerment through self-help and social action (Ontario)

Susan M. Morrison  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Community Psychology Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Morrison, Susan M., "Mothers and Others Making Change: Empowerment through self-help and social action (Ontario)" (1992). *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 608.  
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/608>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

**Mothers and Others Making Change:**  
**Empowerment through self-help and social action**

**By**

**Susan M. Morrison**

BScN., McMaster University, 1972

**THESIS**

Submitted to the department of Psychology  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
1992

(c) Susan M. Morrison 1992



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-74433-2

Canada



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the members of Mothers and Others Making Change. Their enthusiasm, support, love, and above all, acceptance were greatly appreciated and helped me more than words could ever express. I think that each and every one of them are valuable and worthwhile people. Thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members: Dr. Geoff Nelson, my thesis advisor, Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky, Dr. Anne Westhues, and Dr. Ed Bennett. Your comments and support have been appreciated.

And yes, Larry, Karen and Jennifer, I am done now!

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study is an evaluation of the organization, Mothers and Others Making Change (MOMC), a self-help/social action, anti-poverty organization in Kitchener-Waterloo. The research was developed as both an action and a theoretical investigation designed to answer the questions: *Is MOMC an empowering organization?* and *Is MOMC an empowered organization?* Members of MOMC, local and provincial human service representatives and local and provincial politicians were interviewed to obtain their opinions about these questions.

The results indicate that both the self-help and the social action components of the organization are important factors in empowering the members to take control of their own lives. There is also support for the use of an empowerment framework in the study of self-help organizations.

The results further indicate that MOMC may be becoming an empowered organization, although the results were less clear cut at this level than at the previous one. The group and their allies were credited, by the participants, with creating some change in the community and in the province. There is also some evidence to suggest support for Jenkin's (1985) resource mobilization theory and the social movement theory proposed by Spector and Kitsuse (1987). In addition to the definition of success of a social movement as creating changes in power structures, however, the ability of an organization to recycle energy for further action should be added.

The results show promise for empowerment theory, social movement theory and for the role of self-help groups in creating social change. Further research is required.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
Table of contents .....	iii
List of tables .....	vi
List of appendices .....	vii
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	3
Social Context .....	3
Poverty As a Social Issue .....	3
Poverty As a Women's Issue: The Feminization of Poverty.....	4
Theoretical Context .....	7
Ecological and Empowerment Perspective .....	7
Self-Help and Empowerment .....	8
Factors Involved In An Empowered Organization .....	16
Community Development and Social Action .....	21
A History of Social Movements Among the Poor .....	24
Social Movement Theory .....	28
Toward a Definition of Success .....	34
Research Context .....	36
Empowerment Research .....	36
Philosophical Considerations in Research .....	36
The Use of Qualitative Research .....	38
RESEARCH METHODS .....	41
Conceptual Framework .....	41
Researcher/Participant Relationship .....	44
Data Collection .....	45
Interviews With Members .....	48
Interviews With Politicians, Members of OCAP and Community Social Service Members at the Provincial and Local Levels .....	50
Archival Data From Minutes of the Meetings .....	51
Interview Process .....	52
Data Analysis .....	53
Establishing Trustworthiness .....	55
Ethical Issues .....	55
Research Potential .....	56
RESULTS: THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MOMC .....	57
What is MOMC? The View of the Members .....	57
The History of MOMC .....	59
The Beginning .....	59
The Transition: <u>Mothers Making Change</u> to <u>Mothers and Others Making Change</u> .....	60
The Picnic .....	61
Early Meetings .....	64
The Individual Within the Context of MOMC .....	68
The Experience of Poverty .....	68
What MOMC Does For the Members .....	71

The Process of Change For the Members of MOMC .....	74
Support .....	74
Acceptance and equality .....	76
Fun and celebration .....	77
Social comparison .....	77
Sharing .....	79
Information about rights and resources .....	81
Collective action .....	83
Shared beliefs and values .....	85
Community Involvement of Members .....	88
Summary: Individual Level .....	89
<b>DISCUSSION: THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE</b>	
<b>CONTEXT OF MOMC .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Discussion of Results As Action Research .....	93
Discussion of Results as They Relate to Current Theory .....	96
Empowerment Theory .....	97
Factors Involved in Empowerment .....	98
Social support .....	99
Helper-therapy principle .....	99
Sense of community .....	100
Fun, enjoyment and celebration .....	100
Availability of positive role models/ favourable appraisal of one's own situation.....	101
Sharing experiences, problems, solutions and stories .....	101
Gaining knowledge about rights/resources .....	102
Collective action .....	102
Shared beliefs and values .....	103
Process of Empowerment .....	103
<b>RESULTS: MOMC WITHIN THE</b>	
<b>CONTEXT OF A LARGER SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>108</b>
The Organization .....	108
Structure .....	108
Decision-Making .....	108
Leadership .....	109
Funding .....	110
Changes in the Organization .....	112
Community Level .....	113
Community Understanding of MOMC.....	113
Linkages to the Community .....	115
Changes in the Community .....	117
Increased access to food hampers .....	117
Increased community awareness of MOMC .....	119
Increased awareness of poverty issues .....	120
Increased accountability of agencies to consumers .....	121
Process of Community Change .....	123
Political lobbying .....	123
Confrontation .....	126
Collaboration .....	128
Advocacy .....	129
Public education .....	129
Community Concerns and Suggestions For MOMC .....	131
Potential For MOMC in the Community .....	136

Provincial/National Level .....	139
Linkages: MOMC to Provincial Level .....	139
A Recent History of the Anti-Poverty	
Social Movement in Ontario .....	140
The <u>Social Assistance Review Committee</u> process .....	141
The initiative to organize .....	142
Political lobbying .....	144
The planning of the three-pronged march .....	145
Formation of the <u>Ontario Coalition Against Poverty</u> .....	150
The <u>Walk-A-Mile in My Shoes</u> Campaign .....	153
The Election Campaign .....	155
Changes at the Provincial Level .....	156
Increased resources .....	157
Increased public awareness .....	160
Increased power/influence .....	162
Increased accountability .....	163
Formation of an ongoing anti-poverty movement in Ontario.	164
Process of Change at the Provincial Level .....	164
Multilevel initiatives .....	164
Public education .....	165
Coalition building .....	166
Confrontation .....	167
Collaboration .....	169
Potential at the Provincial Level .....	170
Societal Level .....	172
Timing .....	172
The Recession .....	173
Backlash Against Social Assistance .....	174
Political Economic Policy .....	175
Summary: MOMC Within a Larger Societal Context .....	176
DISCUSSION: MOMC WITHIN A LARGER SOCIETAL CONTEXT .....	180
Discussion of Results as Action Research .....	180
Organizational Level .....	181
Community Level .....	183
Provincial Level .....	185
Societal Level .....	186
The Theoretical Discussion .....	189
Organizational Variables .....	189
Situational focus .....	189
Professional collaboration .....	190
Leadership .....	192
Resources within the group .....	194
Community Development and Social Action .....	198
Social Movement Theory .....	199
The Success of the Social Movement .....	204
Societal Level Issues .....	205
CONCLUSIONS .....	207
Conclusions: Action Research .....	207
Conclusions: Theoretical Research .....	209
APPENDICES .....	213
REFERENCES .....	219

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Conceptual Framework .....	43
Table 2: The Process of Empowerment.....	92
Table 3: Results of Action Research .....	181
Table 4: Processes and Outcomes of Participation in MOMC .....	188

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Format for Members of MOMC.....	213
Appendix B: Interview Format for Members of the <u>Ontario Coalition Against Poverty</u> .....	214
Appendix C: Interview Format for Members of the New Democratic Party.....	215
Appendix D: Interview Format for Local and Provincial Social Service Representatives .....	216
Appendix E: Contact Summary Sheet .....	217
Appendix F: Release for President and Vice-President of MOMC .....	218

Mothers and Others Making Change (MOMC) is a politically active self-help group in Kitchener-Waterloo which is devoted to the goals of public education, advocacy, self reliance, enhanced self-esteem, fund raising, and personal goal setting (Purpose, Goals and Objectives, 1988, p. 2). The group was initiated in July of 1988 when a public picnic was organized. The picnic was originally planned as a way to say "good-bye" to a group, Mothers Making Change which had been functioning for about six years under the auspices of Regional Social Services. The picnic, advertised in the classified section of the local newspaper, drew a crowd far larger than anticipated with well over 100 people in attendance. The sharing of common concerns by those who attended lead to the recognition of the need for mutual support and social action by and on behalf of the those who live in poverty. The result was the formation of MOMC - a very diverse group whose only criterion for membership is an understanding of the experience of poverty.

Since that time, the group has engaged in ongoing social action and has become, in some ways, the "voice" of the poor in Kitchener-Waterloo. They have become aligned with many other social action groups in Ontario including the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP); they have been involved in much protest activity; they have become a familiar "spokesperson" in the local newspaper with regard to poverty issues; they have been actively involved in public education programmes; and they have offered tangible and emotional support and advocacy to their members. The group has also been successful in obtaining two grants from the Secretary of State, one for the purpose of public education and one for the purpose of organizational development within the membership. They have also received grants from PLURA (Protestant, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic, Anglican) for the purpose of pursuing their goals.

I became involved with MOMC in the fall of 1988, shortly after the group began. My role was initially that of participant and observer. This role evolved to become one



of consultant to the group regarding the formation of a support and information centre. The members view my role as supportive and some of the members have become my friends.

During my involvement with the group, I have observed major changes in the approach that the group has taken to expressing their concerns, in the structures within the group, in the relationships that they have developed within the community and province-wide and in their personal responses to their situations. It seems that these changes have allowed the group to become more vocal and accepted within the community and the province and more self-reliant within the group.

In considering a topic for a thesis, it became increasingly clear that some sort of documentation of the processes and outcomes of this very unique group would yield insights not only for the practice of community psychology but also for the members of the group who could then become aware of an historical and broad-based view of their work over the past three years.

To that end, this project was developed as a means of studying the processes and outcomes of the activities of Mothers and Others Making Change between July of 1988 and June of 1991. First, however, it is necessary to define the problems faced by those who live in poverty and to provide a theoretical and philosophical framework for conducting this investigation. Some of the issues for those who live in poverty will be briefly presented here (the social context), followed by a discussion of the historical and current theoretical contexts. The results and a discussion of those results, as well as conclusions will then be offered.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Social Context

#### *Poverty as a Social Issue*

The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty (Ross & Shillington, 1989) outlines the facts of poverty in Canada. "Poverty in Canada is a matter not of starving but rather of begging for food at food banks and shelters. It is the result of an unequal distribution of riches rather than a lack of riches" (p. 1). The book gives innumerable statistics about the rate of poverty among various groups. However, what it fails to address is the *experience* of poverty.

Those who live in poverty are exposed to daily stresses which most of us could not even imagine. They are unsure of how they will get the next meal for themselves and their children. They are daily exposed to discrimination - at the bank, at school, at the hospital, at the social service office. Negative stereotyped images of the poor (Belle, 1982), a social assistance system that serves to trap those who depend upon it (Transitions, 1988), and overwhelming discrimination leave those who live in poverty marginalized, powerless and hopeless - on a daily basis. "Discrimination serves to perpetuate the inequalities of our society by denying opportunities for advancements to all citizens" (Belle, 1982, p. 118). The poor feel powerless to change their circumstances (Belle, 1982; Harrington, 1984; Morrison, 1989; Transitions, 1988).

A discussion of poverty would not be complete without addressing the effects on the children of those who live in poverty. In 1986, Statistics Canada estimated that 24.9% of Canadian children live in poverty (Ross & Shillington, 1989, p. 37). They are more likely to drop out of school, become involved with child welfare systems, suffer from low birth weight, develop a psychiatric disorder and to drown; they have a higher mortality rate than their peers who are not poor (Ross & Shillington, 1989, p. 2).

Children who live in poverty are more likely to experience "future difficulties in life" (Transitions, 1988, p. 9).

Also important in the social context is a theory explained by Michael Harrington (1984) and further elucidated by Michael Katz (1989). This theory deals with the usefulness, for the present capitalist system, of classifying and labelling those who live in poverty. These classifications:

"offer a familiar and easy target for displacing rage, frustration and fear..., they demonstrate the link between virtue and success that legitimates capitalist political economy...And by dividing poor people, they prevent their coalescing into a powerful, unified, and threatening political force" (Katz, 1989, p. 10).

Society's classifying of people into categories (such as working poor, deserving poor, unemployed, undeserving poor) serves as a way of further dividing the poor among us. It allows us to believe in the virtue of hard work and profit so essential for a capitalist economy and prevents the poor from uniting together to create change.

The experience of powerlessness, the discrimination, the effects on the future of the children who live in poverty and the labelling, classifying and divisions of the poor, all converge to create a social problem of great concern. A large proportion of our citizens have little hope of ever attaining a reasonable quality of life and are severely at risk for developing problems in the future.

#### *Poverty as a Women's Issue: The Feminization of Poverty*

Two separate facts converge to demonstrate the demographics of poverty among women in Canada today. The first fact is that the estimated poverty rate for lone parent families that are headed by women is 56% (Ross & Shillington, 1989, p. 23). The second fact is that, according to the Canadian Council on Social Development, in 1986, of all the poor families in Canada, 18.6% are single women with children, an increase from 16% in 1976 (Ross & Shillington, 1989, p. 35).

Several factors within our society create an atmosphere that allows this poverty to not only continue but to increase among women. Women are taught that they need to depend on a man for economic survival (Harrington, 1984; Rubin, 1983). The media (television, books, magazine and newspaper articles) serve to perpetuate the "clear, cultural message that they belong in a traditional family with a man at the helm" (Simon, 1988, p. 7). "While it is true that not all women are equally oppressed, the oppression of all women lies in their dependence on the way individual men treat them" (Scott, 1984, p. 19). Fifty-six per cent of lone parent female led families are poor. Women are susceptible to becoming poor through death, desertion or divorce because they are taught to depend on men. Almost all women are at risk for becoming poor.

The accepted societal belief is that women are only in the workforce temporarily and then only to supplement men's income (Ehrenreich & Piven, 1984, p. 63). Women continue to earn significantly less than men - "Statistics Canada figures show women working full time in 1989 made an average of 65.8 per cent of what men working full time earned" (Kitchener-Waterloo Record, January 4, 1991, p. F8). Despite affirmative action programmes and the acceptance of women into non-traditional occupations, women continue to be promoted less often, remain in low-paying, often service sector jobs and are less often unionized (Egan et al., 1988; Katz, 1989; Scott, 1984).

Women continue to be relegated to these low-paying, service-oriented jobs and are still expected to do most of the child care and housework. "A UN report on the status of women in 1979 declared that women do two-thirds of the world's work and receive 10 per cent of the world's income" (Scott, 1984, p. x). In our society, those jobs that are technologically-oriented receive the greatest remuneration. However, women, who have traditionally been taught to do caring and service work, are not equipped to compete in the technological world because of their educational focus and societal expectations of their role (Rubin, 1983).

The above factors combine to leave women ill-prepared to support a family. However, the rising divorce rate and the changing demographics of family life indicate that there is a need for many women to support a family and that this will become increasingly necessary in the future.

"Women's poverty is a political as well as an economic issue, for it links women, the state, and the meaning of citizenship" (Katz, 1989, p.75). Katz (1986) demonstrates that despite the fact that women have the political potential to influence welfare policy - they comprise the majority of social service employees and the majority of recipients of social support - they are unable to translate this potential into effective political action (p. 76). "They remain, in truth, less than full citizens, and the obstacles to their effective mobilization are enormous" (Katz, 1989, p. 76).

Poverty is a women's issue, both for the present and for the future. Young women need to be taught that the risk is high that they will at some point in their lives be required to support a family. It is time to leave the "happily ever after" fairy tale behind. Structures which support women who choose to stay at home to care for their children need to be adequate. Women need to join together to overcome the obstacles to their full participation in society.

Thus far, the social context related to poverty has been discussed. Mothers and Others Making Change has decided to deal with these issues through a process of social action and mutual aid. In order to evaluate the processes and outcomes of this approach, it is important to review both the historical, empirical and theoretical context currently available through research and publication. First, however, it is important to set a framework for evaluating that history and theory. Community psychology, with an emphasis on an ecological, empowerment philosophy, serves to create a perspective within which to evaluate this history and theory.

## Theoretical Context

### *Ecological and Empowerment Perspective*

In community psychology, there is an emphasis on addressing issues from an ecological perspective (Heller et al., 1984, pp. 121-123). This implies that what occurs in a given situation is a result of influences from many levels - cultural, societal, organizational, interpersonal and individual.

Heller et al. (1984) further outline the elements of this ecological perspective. *Interdependence* implies that if changes occur at one level, then alterations (for better or worse) will occur at other levels as well. *Cycling of resources* implies that one needs to evaluate the definition and utilization of the resources available within a community. *Adaptation* implies that people adapt to new roles and environments as changes occur. It is essential that necessary supports are available so that this adaptation can occur. *Succession* implies that the "direction in which a community is already changing must be taken into account" (p. 122).

In this research, the perspective is ecological. While the primary unit of investigation is the organization, Mothers and Others Making Change, the influences from other levels of analysis - cultural, societal, interpersonal and individual - cannot be ignored.

Empowerment is a further construct that has become increasingly important to community psychologists. In his 1980 presidential address to the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association, Julian Rappaport (1981) proposed an empowerment model to create a "symbolic sense of urgency" (p. 1) for community psychologists. Since that time, the concept of empowerment has been discussed and evaluated at length and has become a primary concept for the practice of community psychology. "The idea of empowerment has served as a rallying cry for

a number of community psychologists and others interested in community and organizational change" (Price, 1990, p. 163).

Empowerment "takes on a different form in different people and contexts" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 2). It is "a process through which people become more able to influence those people and organizations that affect their lives and the lives of those they care about" (Vanderslice, 1984, p. 2). Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) describe empowerment as:

"a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to matters of social policy and social change... While empowerment is a multilevel construct that may be applied to organizations, communities, and social policies, psychological empowerment is the expression of this construct at the level of individual persons... Psychological empowerment may be generally described as the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in, the public domain" (pp. 726 & 746).

Both an ecological perspective and an empowerment framework have been used to evaluate the current empirical and theoretical literature with regards to a group such as MOMC. The literature has been reviewed at three levels: 1) the *empowering* effects on an individual of participation in a self-help/mutual aid group, 2) the organizational variables which may impact on how an organization is *empowered*, and 3) the history and present state of social movement theory.

#### *Self-help and empowerment*

Self-help groups are based on the philosophy of mutual aid and the "helper-therapy" principle - people get helped most by helping others. Members can learn common aspects of their problem, share information, experience strong group acceptance and shared understanding and develop a social support network (Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Gottlieb, 1983; Hurley, 1988; Initiatives, 1989; Mowrer, 1984; Riessman, 1990a).

In short, self-help groups meet:

"a need that people have for each other - a basic human interdependence...The basic dignity of man (woman) is expressed in his (her) capacity to be involved in reciprocal helping relationships. Out of his (her) compassion comes cooperation; only then is it possible to build a community" (Silverman, 1978, quoted in Mowrer, 1984, p. 146).

Self-help groups have long been thought of as positive sources of cooperation, compassion and community which serve to enhance social relationships, self-esteem and feelings of acceptance and competency. They have the potential to be sources of personal empowerment.

The experience of disadvantaged groups in a community is described by O'Neill and Trickett (1982) as powerlessness and helplessness. They cite Iscoe (1970) as saying: "One of the most destructive legacies of paternalism which exists in almost every poor community is the destruction of poor people's faith in themselves and their abilities" (p. 218). They describe the psychology of powerlessness as the pervasive belief that:

"Things are as they should be.  
Things can't be changed.  
I can't do anything to change things." (p. 218)

They believe that in order for members to proceed with any community development activities, these pervasive beliefs must be overcome. The realization that they have been treated unfairly can "engender a sense of injustice that prompts social action" (p. 220). Being a member of a disadvantaged group is a disempowering experience. To enable members to become socially active requires a process of education and empowerment. Self-help groups have the potential to be sources of this educational and empowering process.

Although "those who attend and join self-help groups view their participation as satisfying and beneficial" (Wollert et al., 1987, p. 505), little research has been done with regards to the empowering effects of these groups. However, more recent research has indicated that perhaps there are other components to the empowering process of



self-help groups. Roberts et al. (1991) report that in addition to helping others, getting support and encouragement and identifying similarities are also important components of the process:

"Mutual help members feel that helping others, getting support and encouragement, and experiencing their problems as similar to others' are the most helpful or therapeutic aspects of their mutual help experience... there is some evidence that receiving social support may be one of the processes benefitting mutual help members" (pp. 716-717).

Borkman (1991) emphasizes that not enough research has been conducted regarding the social support aspect of self-help groups. She encourages viewing self-help groups as alternative kin networks or forms of communities.

"Not enough attention is paid to them (self-help groups) as fellowships that provide social support, alternative kin networks, or as a form of communities of interest structured to suit mobile... lifestyles. No studies have been conducted to determine how many people involved in self-help groups compared to their peers without such support, avoid institutionalization in mental hospitals or jails or escape homelessness because they have a support network that cares for them during a crisis" (p. 645-646).

Gottlieb (1983) identified social support as an important component in people's lives and articulated the process of social support as it acts as a mediator to stress. He believes that the presence of supportive associates reduces stress, increases self-confidence and thus enhances problem-solving behaviours. This he believes occurs through the process of social support - through redirecting problem-solving, offering concrete aid and intervening in the environment.

"Feedback from supportive companions that communicates reassurance and affirmation may prevent damages to the parties' self-concepts by conditioning a steadfast sense of self-esteem and personal efficacy... supportive companions prevent active coping efforts from being hampered by self-recrimination... Close associates can ameliorate ongoing adjustment strivings by redirecting problem-solving strategies, by providing concrete services and tangible aid, and by intervening in the environment in ways that either prevent exposure to stressors in the first place or enhance the socio-emotional provisions that can be marshalled on behalf of the focal individual. By shoring up those rational problem-solving activities that eventually lead to mastery and by supplementing the fund of psychosocial assets available in the environment, peer bonds buttress the behavioral dimension of coping" (p. 281).

If self-help groups are a source of social support, it would follow that the members of a self-help group would also receive these benefits of that social support.

Gottlieb (1983) further believes that moving the blame from self to other (external) causes enables members of self-help groups to feel less inadequate and allows them to gain control of their own emotional lives and solutions to their own problems.

"(Participation in self-help groups) encourages members to make external attributions about the causes of their problem while also reassuring them about the normativeness of seeking help for the problem or condition they are experiencing... members do not view their help-seeking and their problems as evidence of personal inadequacy or deviance... by encouraging participants to see themselves as active agents of change, mutual help groups also foster members' sense of control over their emotional lives and their sense of responsibility for the solution of their problems" (p. 284).

In his evaluation of incentives in collective action organizations, Knoke (1988) suggests that different members have different motivations for participation. Those who desire interpersonal/social benefits from the group will focus on internal activities whereas those who desire public policy changes will focus on external activities. He proposes that "differences in members' involvements are a function of multiple motivations and organizational incentives" (p. 311). He suggests that those who participate within the group receive social benefits whereas those who focus their activity outside of the group desire social change.

Prestby et al. (1990) suggest assessing the participation of members as a cost/benefit ratio. An organization can create an environment which is a good "fit" between the individuals and the organization. In this way members would receive enough benefits from their participation to offset the personal costs (time, energy) which they incur. *"Leaders / organizations can promote individual participation and thereby individual empowerment through incentive and cost management efforts"* (italics in original, p. 141).

Chavis and Wandersman (1990) relate the role of participating more in a neighbourhood group to the development of a sense of community and the resultant feelings of shared emotional ties, support, opportunity and mutual influence. They believe that these feelings in turn lead to a perception of control and empowerment within the community (p. 56).

Sarason (1974) also identified the effects of the development of a sense of community on the individual. A sense of community leads to:

"... the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure" (p.157).

Wollert (1986) reports that while many studies have focused on the processes of self-help groups, "no consensus exists on those (processes) of greatest importance" (p.64). He suggests that future research should focus on the interrelationships between "organizational variables, helping processes, and personal change in self-help groups" (p. 74).

There are indications in the literature then that there is a relationship between self-help/mutual aid and empowerment. Through research, it is becoming increasingly clear what some of the empowerment processes of self-help groups may be. Those which have been identified include: the "helper-therapy principle", acceptance, shared understanding, social support (through redirecting problem-solving, concrete aid and intervention in the environment), attribution of blame to external factors, and the development of a sense of community.

Lord and Farlow (1990) suggest the process of empowerment begins when there is a crisis or motivational trigger in a person's life. This "leads to change because individuals learn they have a voice, and that there are people who will listen and understand. The willingness to question is also an important factor here." In addition,

there is usually a change in context - physical or social - and there is often a significant person in their lives who is inspiring and supportive. This person often serves as an important bridge to peers (p. 4).

"As the process evolved, many participants found that their growing consciousness of their own capacities and rights helped them to develop a sense of personal control and competence. Involvement in community life was mentioned by most as being key to the growth in their personal empowerment... Our data suggest that empowerment is both an internal and external process." (Lord & Farlow, 1990, p. 4).

Lord and Farlow (1990) then view empowerment as a process which is both internal and external - an individual experiences a motivational trigger; a change in context occurs; there is a significant person who acts as a bridge to peers; there is involvement in the community; and feelings of control and competence begin to emerge. This sense of empowerment that emerges depends on the availability of structures that allow for "involvement in community life".

There is some indication in the literature that there is a relationship between participation in a self-help and/or social action organization and empowerment. In a review of their empowerment research, Lord and Farlow (1990) discuss the role of this participation in the empowerment process. "Participation appears to contribute to empowerment because it increases social contact, reduces isolation, and enables people to take part in a meaningful activity." (p. 6).

The role of participation is also emphasized by Adamson et al. (1988). They see participation in collective action as a means of developing a shared vision with others.

"Collective action as the route to change empowers people in the face of their powerlessness... (It) can reshape our lives and the world around us; it can also change the way we see ourselves - not as individuals struggling in isolation to survive, but as part of a collective of shared interest and vision. This can be a transforming and empowering experience and demonstrates in practice the limits of individualism" (p. 155).

Riger (1984) also identifies the role that participation in a grassroots organization may play in the development of empowerment. "Grassroots organizations

that enable people to obtain access to resources and develop skill and self-esteem can be important vehicles for empowerment" (p. 99). The potential empowering effects of collective action have been recognized.

Kieffer (1984) interviewed 15 individuals involved in grassroots organizations. He concluded that "experience is the core of empowerment learning" (p. 26). Only through doing, over an extended period of time, can one become empowered by participation in the community. He also offers some criteria for the success of this empowerment process. He suggests that the participants in his research did not view themselves as *having* more power but as *feeling* more powerful.

"They did see themselves as becoming more efficacious participants in the political process and local decision making... (and as) growing better able to engage effectively in the dynamics of social and political exchange" (p. 32).

In his historical review of neighbourhood organizing, Fisher (1984) quotes Kathleen McCourt(1977) as concluding that:

"Participation in assertive, conflict-oriented, community organizations was a politicizing experience... Participation in such organizations helped members see the implications of their concerns and armed them with new information, greater self-confidence, and pride. In short, conflict empowers people... (Even defeat) led to continued efforts and greater involvement" (p. 10).

Gidron et al. (1991) confirm the fact that social activism appears to be a by-product of participation in a self-help organization:

"(There is a significant difference) in their sense of social and public activism. This life change outcome has been reported previously as one of the most common products of self-help group participation" (p.679).

The potential for participation in an organization such as MOMC to be an empowering experience has been identified. This empowerment appears to be a process that occurs over time and seems to be related to gaining access to information, increased self-confidence, and being part of a shared vision or collective consciousness.

Empowerment at the individual level has been viewed in the literature as a process that involves having a bridge to peers, a supporting and accepting person, developing a sense of community, moving blame outside of the self, gaining social support, and the development of a shared vision. This process leads to increased confidence, increased participation and a belief in one's own ability to gain control over his/her own life.

Several community psychologists have expanded on the definitions of empowerment by differentiating between an *empowering* organization - one which promotes the participation of the members - and an *empowered* organization - one which is effective in changing the environment, power structure, etc. (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Perkins et al., 1990; Prostby et al., 1990; Zimmerman, 1990). Zimmerman (cited in Florin and Wandersman, 1990) suggests that:

"Distinctions have been made between *empowering* organizations which facilitate confidence and competencies of individual members and *empowered* organizations which influence the environment or community" (p. 44).

It would appear then that the construct of empowerment can be viewed as going further than the individual to incorporate an ecological perspective which deals with a person-environment fit. Not only does the concept of empowerment address the strengths of an individual but also deals with the environment of that individual - his/her cultural, societal, organizational, and community environment and how that environment interacts with that individual to create a situation where empowerment is possible. "Empowerment embodies an interaction between individuals and environments that is culturally and contextually defined" (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 169). It is "organizational, political, economic, and spiritual" (Rappaport, 1987, P. 130).

Prilleltensky (in press) also emphasizes the importance for members of disadvantaged groups, of becoming more powerful in the social realm.

"Individuals and groups facing disempowering life events and circumstances require assistance in changing not only their perception of power, but also, and more importantly, the real constellations of social power that deprive them of rights, goods, and services... (O)ppressed individuals need to be empowered to oppose structural configurations of power that precluded them from experiencing control in the past and perpetuate their misfortune in the present" (p. 33).

The theoretical possibilities for MOMC, as a self-help/mutual aid and social action organization, to be an *empowering* organization have been suggested. The other side of the issue involves the role of MOMC as an *empowered* organization. What has been the effect of MOMC's participation in a larger social movement? Is MOMC an *empowered* organization? These questions relate to the organizational structure of Mothers and Others Making Change, the relationship that MOMC has developed with the community and with the provincial organization, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

#### *Factors Involved In An Empowered Organization*

Prestby et al. (1990) suggest that participation in an organization is positively related to "improved physical conditions, decreased deterioration, and increased social services at the community level, suggesting that participation in community organizations influences both community and organizational empowerment" (p.118). They imply that an organization also needs to be empowered.

Keys and Franks (1987) specify the role of community psychologists in examining organizational structures such as social action organizations. "The capacity of organizational structures and processes for enhancing the quality of individuals' lives takes precedence over other criteria of organizational effectiveness, be they productivity, power maintenance, or organizational survival" (p. 241). In keeping with an empowerment framework, community psychology is most interested in the empowering effects of participation in an organization - not in the productivity,

maintenance or survival of that organization. However, if one is to assess whether an organization is empowered, it is important to evaluate what some of the reasons for that empowerment may be. For this reason, a review of some of the factors reported in the literature that may enable this process has been included in this review.

Herman (1982, 1983) suggests that the attitude of an organization for those who live in poverty appears to influence its success. Based on a situational theory of participation in an organization, he explored the hypothesis that "the effects of participation (in a social action group) are mediated by differences in the characteristics of the organizations" (1983, p. 358). In his review of the literature (1982), he found many evaluations had been based on a subcultural theory which implies that the characteristics of the poor need to be changed for them to be able to participate in a social action organization. His analysis of case studies of eleven different organizations lead him to conclude that:

"Instances of personal impact and of more important impact are concentrated in the organizations consistent with situational theory and inconsistent with subcultural theory... what is important is that an organization's sponsors and participants not create an organization with the view that the personalities of the poor need changing. This most often happens when the poor are involved in creating and directing the organization" (Herman, 1983, p. 366).

The structure of an organization in which the poor are involved and the attitude of those involved in the group toward poverty are important considerations in the process of encouraging participation in a social action organization. The purpose of the groups often contributes to their success. Those that focus on changing situations (as opposed to changing people) are more successful. Only recently has a theory of poverty incorporated the situational approach as opposed to the "subculture of poverty" approach (Herman, 1983). This view allows for the potential for those who live in poverty to participate in social action and community development.



Throughout the history of self-help groups, both the professional community and the self-help group members have looked at each other with "mutual disregard and distrust" (Mowrer, 1984, p.139-140). The relationship between self-help groups and professionals is one of the "most often discussed, crucial and vexing (questions) posed by the re-emergence of self-help groups" (Cherniss & Cherniss, 1987, p.435). Professionals have been said to harbour "overly cautious, negative attitudes toward self-help groups" (Kurtz & Chambon, 1987, p.275).

However, as clearly articulated by Powell and Cameron (1991), this resistance to the independence of self-help groups may also be related to the threat they may feel to their own dominance in the field of helping others.

"For their part, professionals sometimes react as if their livelihood was threatened by self-help services. With more reason, but not with more justification, professionals react to self-help as a threat to their hegemony in the services field" (p. 799).

There has also historically been strong resistance by self-help groups to collaboration with professionals. Early research showed that when a self-help group is started by a professional, it remains traditional and professionally oriented. As well, when professionals became involved, the result has been conflict and/or co-optation by the professional (Cherniss & Cherniss, 1987, p.432 & 436). Although many self-help groups do have professional involvement (Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Kurtz & Chambon, 1987), self-help group members often hold a strong bias against professional help. They fear co-optation and view professional involvement as a diversion from goals of social change and as a way of segmenting the self-help movement (Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Wollert, Knight & Levy, 1984). The groups often believe that the professional will, by practising his/her profession, express ideas counter to the ideology of the group, be judgemental, decrease the anonymity of the group and undercut group process. In addition, the groups believe that they surrender their autonomy, egalitarianism and their sense of urgency while professionals gain identity, power and control by their

involvement in the groups (Wollert, Knight & Levy, 1984, pp.129-137). Lavoie (1984) contends that professional involvement in self-help groups jeopardizes the originality (and perhaps the "naturalness") of the system (p.174).

There has been much controversy about the role of the professional in self-help groups - a seemingly dialectical relationship. One side - the self-help groups - resists professional involvement, the other side - the professionals - although in the past ignoring and distrusting the groups has become increasingly interested in their potential and would like to become involved in the solutions to the obstacles the groups face.

Riessman (1989) argues that the dialectical relationship between professionals and self-help groups is useful in that it includes both the "unity and the struggle of opposites" (p.9). Both sides can benefit from their interactions if they can recognize both their oppositional and their complementary aspects. He argues that the empowerment process that occurs for members of self-help groups counters the dangers of co-optation and diversion from social and structural analysis (p.9). Mowrer (1984) stresses that professionals and self-help groups share a common goal - that of promoting human well-being (p.146). With a common goal and the recognition of commonalities and opposition, a productive relationship may potentially be developed. Many authors (Cherniss & Cherniss, 1988; Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Hurley, 1988; Lavoie, 1984; Mowrer, 1984; Wollert, Knight & Levy, 1984) suggest that professionals be involved in self-help groups in a consultative/collaborative role rather than in a central role with the power to control the processes of the group.

Cherniss and Cherniss (1987) note that positive outcome for a self-help group is partially associated with a "substantial retention of *control* by group members. (This member control) prevents loss of empowerment and peer support." The other factor associated with the success of self-help groups is "a high frequency of *collaboration* between the (self-help group) and professionals" (p. 436). In this collaborative model, the

professional serves as a facilitator or enabler to the group and assumes the role of resource person as opposed to that of direct service provider. The consultant shares his/her skills (organizational, advocacy, problem solving and group process skills) with the group members so that they learn the "tools" for the successful operation of their group. The control and decision making power remains within the group and the consultant intervenes only when he/she is requested to do so. The literature suggests that the relationship between professionals and the members of a self-help group is most productive when members retain control of the group and also collaborate with professionals.

Mothers and Others Making Change can be considered an antibureaucratic collective (Heller et al., 1984, p. 307). This implies that the organization has been set up in opposition to the "system". A collective has shared authority, minimal rules, ideals of community, recruitment based on friendship, values, and personality attributes, informally assessed knowledge and skills, no hierarchy, egalitarian structure, and minimal division of labour (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 308). Heller et al. (1984) discuss some of the problems which often plague these antibureaucratic collectives. Often, when the charismatic leader who forms the group leaves, the organizations become "differentiated bureaucracies" (p.310). Power will eventually come into the hands of a small group of people. In order to prevent this, some organizations set rules of leadership so that any leader can only have the position for a year. Another issue for collectives involves the influx of outside resources which often increases the need for organization within the collective.

Riger (cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 311) identified eight factors which predict whether or not feminist movement organizations would retain their quality as collectives, as opposed to becoming transposed into a bureaucracy. These include:

- skills and knowledge are equally distributed;
- size is small;
- organization is financially dependent on members;
- self and mutual criticism is regular and sanctioned;
- there are efficient responses to external demands (e.g. to the needs of rape victims);
- members expect and value participation over organizational efficiency;
- members receive interpersonal rewards as incentive to participate; and
- networks of friendship, expertise, and support do not overlap, preventing the centralization of informal sources of power.

Another problem identified as being associated with collectives is "burn-out".

"The very nature of alternative institutions almost guarantees that burn-out will take place" (Freudenberger, 1973, cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 314). This burn-out is often related to overcommitment and emotional intensity and a solution may be to work toward reducing this intensity. Another potential process which may serve to alleviate burn-out is an evaluation which would serve to give clear information about how well an organization or a particular member is doing (Heller et al., 1984, pp. 314-315).

Many organizational variables impact on the success of an organization such as MOMC. These include: the involvement of professionals, leadership variables, size, values, responses, equality, rewards, the sharing of power and the prevention of overcommitment and emotional intensity.

### *Community Development and Social Action*

Florin and Wandersman (1990) have concluded through their research on citizen participation that the study of empowerment using the framework of citizen participation and community development has several advantages. These include: the connection of empowerment concepts to broad literature, a multidisciplinary perspective on empowerment that is useful for prevention, the provision of concrete settings for the implementation of developing empowerment concepts and the broadening of attention to collective, ecological, individual and intrapsychic empowerment (p.46). Although the study of empowerment through citizen participation,

community development and social action is very new, both theory and research suggest that this area of research could be very useful to those involved in these areas of research and practice and to the citizens who participate in these activities.

Florin and Wandersman (1990) define community development as "voluntary cooperation and self-help/mutual-aid efforts ... which aim to improve the physical, social, and economic conditions of the community" (p. 45). Rothman (1968,1974, cited in Heller & Monahan, 1977) differentiates between community development and social action strategies for change. He suggests that community development activities are appropriate when there is an uncommitted majority who may be able to be swayed in their opinion, when there is agreement on underlying values, when there are untapped resources available, and when decisions are made in a pluralistic way (with much discussion). They are viewed as consensus-building strategies. In most communities, however, there are "constraints which can prevent cooperation and consensus alone from achieving constructive change" (Heller et al., 1984, p. 357).

"Officials rarely perceive the mandate to innovate. They do so when they believe there is consensus for action in the community. Without such a consensus, they function to keep the community on an even keel - in equilibrium" (Heller & Monahan, 1977, p. 349).

In order to successfully convince those in power that this consensus exists, it may be necessary to also engage in social action activities.

Social action can be defined as strategies that spotlight the problems of a group of citizens and raise questions about accepted community roles and procedures (Heller et al., 1984, p. 355). Rothman (1968,1974; cited in Heller & Monahan, 1977) suggests that social action activities are more appropriately used when there is a strongly antagonistic majority, when values clash, when resources are scarce, and when those in power make the decisions (pp.344-358). Conflict strategies highlight problems of a group of citizens and raise questions about accepted community norms. "The principal goal of social

action is to achieve a shift in power relationships to insure a more equitable distribution of resources" (Heller et al., 1984, p. 355).

Alinsky (1971) believes that social action is essential to gain power before negotiations can take place. "No one can negotiate without the power to compel" (p. 119). Heller and Monahan (1977) agree with this view: "Conciliation only occurs among equals who see that it is in their self-interest to cooperate" (p. 355). O'Neill and Trickett (1982) believe that "for a disadvantaged group, a conflict situation can be an opportunity to make gains" (p. 217). Disadvantaged groups may need to engage in social action activities to create an opportunity for change and to shift some power to themselves so that negotiations can occur in a more equal environment.

There are potential problems, however, with a social action approach to change. These include an attitudinal backlash in the community, so that "social action may work best when there are those within the system working for change along more traditional routes" (Heller et al., 1984, p. 357). A social action approach also assumes that there are not enough resources available in the community - an assumption which may or may not be true. If this assumption is not correct, then planning and negotiation may suffice. Another important consideration before engaging in social action activities is often neglected. "Power without program is not enough ... Changing the group that has control does not mean that better decisions will be made." (Heller et al., 1984, p. 357). Any social action is more powerful if the request for change is accompanied by suggestion(s) for positive processes for change.

O'Neill and Trickett (1982) suggest that organizers involved with disadvantaged groups may:

"achieve problem solving if they can introduce strategies and tactics, and if the group correctly targets the source of the problems... Strategy involves doing something when the time is right whereas tactics involves how that something is done. An effort to bring about social change may be successful with good strategy and poor tactics but rarely the reverse" (O'Neill & Trickett, 1982, p. 223, 241-242).

It is important for both community development and social action activities to be aimed at the source of the problem and that the strategy chosen "fits" with the identified goal.

Riessman (1990) identifies the potential for self-help groups to become vehicles for social change. He believes that the emergence of the self-help movement may be a means of politicizing issues and creating a society that is more responsive to people's needs.

"Self-help groups ... have the potential to be a stepping stone toward political organization - though clearly this potential has not been fully realized .... Nothing should cause us to overlook the concrete, fresh, populist efforts of millions of ordinary people to invent innovative approaches to felt needs. In a sense, people are searching for a new politics, which in the long run will have to be responsive to and integrated with an emphasis on societal reconstruction." (pp. 43 & 48).

The members of MOMC engage in both community development and social action activities. The group's end goal is to facilitate changes in the lives of those who live in poverty through changes in the social structure and through self-help/mutual-aid activities. The potential for the role of self-help groups to facilitate social change has been recognized.

The potential for MOMC to be an empowering organization and some of the organizational factors and processes of community organizing that may allow MOMC to be an empowered organization have thus far been presented from a theoretical stance. It is necessary at this point to discuss both the historical and the theoretical contexts of social movements before proceeding with the reporting of the research results.

#### *A History of Social Movements Among the Poor*

In reviewing the literature regarding social movements among the poor, it became increasingly evident that although much has been written about social movements, little research has examined poor people's movements. The focus of the literature regarding social movements relates more often to workers (e.g., Jenkins, 1985),

the feminist movement (e.g., Adamson et al., 1988; Katzenstein et al., 1987; Riger, 1984; Staggenborg, 1989), and the civil rights movement (e.g., Gamson, 1975; Lader, 1979). Very little has been documented regarding the mobilization and organization of the poor.

Cloward and Piven (1972) have discussed at length the politics of poverty in the 1960's in the United States. The "War Against Poverty" was a government program in the U.S. set up to allow for increased education and community action and participation by and on behalf of the poor. The aim of the program was to reduce poverty in the United States without the spending of massive amounts of money. Ombudspersons and advocates were hired and the poor were encouraged to participate in planning new programs. Sympathizers thought that, given the opportunity, the poor would be able to use reason through bureaucratic and political channels instead of through the protests and violence - marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, mob-ins, traffic tie-ups and rent strikes (p. 69) which were rampant in the cities at that time. However, Cloward and Piven (1972) argue that the program was in actuality an effort to restore order to the cities and to solidify black-voter allegiance which had been eroded by the North-South split in the Democratic party on the issue of integration (Cloward & Piven, 1972, pp. 268-270). "Most of the gains made by the black poor as a result of federal intervention were in public welfare" (Cloward & Piven, 1972, p. 270). Efforts to achieve goals related to education, health care, housing and jobs were less successful because the organized groups which supplied these services made their own claims and the costs to the municipalities skyrocketed, leaving these needs unsatisfied. In addition, many of the programs set up were used to "induce submissive behaviours" in the poor or were "perverted into a public relations process on the part of government agencies" (p. 5). Real change in the circumstances of the poor was made in the amount of money which



they received but there was no change in the power which they had to create changes in other areas.

Piven and Cloward (1977) also documented the process of the formation of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), an organization designed to organize large numbers of those who lived in poverty on the assumption that "political influence would result ...despite lack of access to resources" (Piven & Cloward, 1977, p. 280). The NWRO initially was very successful in organizing the poor first to apply for assistance and then to make claims for special grants. This tactic served to overload the "system" and yielded some success in relieving destitution for large numbers of people. However, efforts to mobilize a mass membership base to meet the goal of a strong organization based on large numbers of poor people was not achieved once the initial demands had been met.

Piven and Cloward (1977) offer many reasons for this apparent lack of success. "Neither mobilizing nor organizing tactics worked to sustain the group" (p. 308). Efforts to mobilize lead to problems with the key dilemma of mass-based, permanent organizing theory - "how to sustain continuing participation in the absence of continuing inducements to participation" (p. 287). Once the initial demands were met, members no longer needed the assistance of the organization - their issue was resolved or they had learned to deal with it on their own. The grievance work being done took an enormous amount of time and energy and new volunteers had to be continually trained. In addition, formal avenues were established to deal with the grievances so that the group's collective means of action were no longer necessary. Another possible reason for this issue of sustainability is that most people on social assistance are only on for a relatively short period of time (Transitions, 1988). Their identification with a welfare rights group may be time-limited.

Efforts to organize were also thwarted by struggles within the organization for leadership positions. "The goal of mass membership was subordinated to leadership strivings ... the proliferation of organizational leadership positions constrained the expansion of organizational membership" (p. 316). In addition, the group's relationship with external resources changed so that there was more reliance on these resources than on internal, membership resources. The NWRO became a lobbying and coalition building group aimed at building external support.

An "era of mutuality and exchange" (p. 327) emerged. The disrupters had been granted a "symbolic role in the system, for it was a time-honoured method of restoring calm" (p. 328).

"Group action was no longer necessary, and the group consciousness disintegrated. The sense of participation in something larger than oneself, the sense of belonging to a movement, was gradually lost... With quiescence restored, the 'social pathologies' of the poor were redefined as having their cause in overly permissive relief arrangements, not in defective socioeconomic arrangements" (Piven & Cloward, 1977, pp. 330-339).

The era of protest had ended and the NWRO was absorbed into the system.

The accounts by Piven and Cloward (1977; Cloward & Piven 1972) of these social movements clearly outline the ecological perspective these authors employ in their evaluations. Cultural values, organizational structure and responses by government all had an impact on the efforts of the poor in the United States to unite and succeed in bringing their grievances to the public. However, once the poor had a symbolic means to address these issues, an era of conservatism emerged; public support dwindled; and the impetus to organize disintegrated.

Field (1982) discussed the effectiveness of the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) formed by the Quakers in the early 1960's in Britain. The organization's primary goal was to politically influence the government of Britain in an attempt to eradicate child poverty. In this case study, he uses extensive examples of lobbying

tactics, explores the group's relationship with the media, and relates the history of the organization. He believes that the CPAG was successful in bringing about:

"marked changes in the attitudes of politicians ...But the most important of all have been CPAG's efforts in changing the attitudes of the poor themselves ...More and more poor people are seeing their poverty less as a sign of personal failure, and more as a result of the actions of governments and an electorate which supports those governments" (pp. 73-74).

This excellent case history makes for stimulating reading and offers many suggestions of tactics groups could use for the purpose of political pressure. However, the group's purpose was not as a grassroots organization, it was political in nature. No theoretical context was offered.

This history of past efforts to mobilize those who live in poverty is brief because little has been documented specifically about this segment of the population. Further evaluation of more general social movement theory as gleaned from the literature is now needed as a framework for evaluation of the influence MOMC may have had through its affiliation with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

### *Social Movement Theory*

Sociologists have long been interested in the study of social movements. However, this study has just recently emerged from what Gamson (1975) refers to as the "straightjacket of collective behaviour" (p. 130). According to this theory of collective behaviour, social movements are simply a symptom of social disorganization - a reaction expressed by the victims of social disorder. This tradition views alienation and loss of identity as the reasons (or intervening variables) that lead to participation in social movements. People involved in social movements are believed to be unaware of the underlying conditions that create these feelings of alienation and loss of identity. Their actions are only a way of expressing their discontent. It is believed that organized

groups - those with social legitimacy - are acting to achieve goals whereas social movements are viewed as only serving the purpose of expressing discontent. Needless to say, this collective behaviour theory has served to discredit many mass movements; their only purpose was to express discontent, they had no "real" purpose.

This view gradually changed as more evaluation of the demonstrations of the late 1960's emerged. Social movements came to be defined as a "continuous process of organizational activity" (Gamson, 1975, p. 139). They became viewed as different from other organizations only because they are in opposition to the status quo.

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) were among the first to define the activities of groups that comprise a social movement as "claims-making activities" (Chapter 5). They define social problems as "*the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative condition*" (italics in original, p. 75). They assert that it is less important to understand the conditions which give rise to a social problem than it is to understand the "activities of any group making claims on others for ameliorative action, material remuneration, alleviation of social, political legal and economic disadvantage" (p. 76). They believe that it is the activities of the claims-making groups and the reactions of society to these claims that needs to be evaluated rather than the claims themselves. "The theoretical problem is to account for how categories of social problems and deviance are produced, and how methods of social control and treatment are institutionally established" (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 72).

To this end, Spector and Kitsuse (1987) developed a four-stage model of claims-making activities, which deals with the stages of a social problem. These stages include: *Stage 1*: The group(s) attempt to define the condition that they find offensive or harmful and create a political or public issue by stimulating controversy and making public their assertions.

*Stage 2:* The demands of the group(s) are recognized by an official organization, agency or institution. This may be followed by an official investigation, proposals for reform, and the establishment of a forum to respond to the claims of the group.

*Stage 3:* Further dissatisfaction is expressed by the same or other groups regarding the procedures which have been established to deal with the imputed conditions.

*Stage 4:* The group(s) reject the official response to their claims or the lack of response and seek to create alternative, parallel or counter-institutions in response (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 142).

Spector and Kitsuse (1987), then, view social problems as a series of claims by groups and responses by official agencies which result in either resolution of the problem or the creation of alternatives. In keeping with the view of Spector and Kitsuse (1987) that the issue under investigation should be the process of the emergence of a social issue as opposed to the content of that issue, Jenkins (1985) articulated a theory of resource mobilization with respect to social movements. According to Jenkins (1985), there are four important considerations when evaluating the potential for success of a social movement. These include: 1) mobilization potential, 2) strategic position, 3) strategies of mobilization, and 4) structure of political alignments. He claims that all four of these considerations need to be at a minimum threshold level in order to support a successful insurgency (p. 19). Each of these will be considered separately.

*Mobilization potential* refers to the social/structural conditions of the group prior to actual mobilization - the indigenous resources of the group (those that are available within the group), its internal organizational structure, and the amount of institutional control held by the main opponents. Jenkins (1985) believes that groups that have resources - in particular, experienced organizers, recognized leaders, a means of communication (e.g., newspaper) and a meeting facility - are more readily mobilized for action against an opponent. Jenkins (1985) further suggests that a linking together

through interpersonal bonds and/or social networks into an inclusive network yields a greater potential for mobilization. The more cohesive the group, the more potential available for mobilization. He suggests that either an emotional commitment as a basis for the receipt of valued social relations or the internalizing of a moral code serve to bind members to the group. The values of the groups within a network must be compatible with the goal of the movement.

Mueller (1987) also emphasizes the role of collective consciousness - "a transforming set of ideas that legitimate opposition to traditional norms, roles, institutions and/or the distribution of scarce resources" (p. 92) in maintaining or initiating the impetus of a social movement. The important aspect of this definition is that it does not focus on an increase in the discontent but on an increase of the awareness about a particular situation. She claims that the creation of this collective consciousness among participants is:

"critical for converting activists, for enlisting support of third parties, for mobilizing movement activists and for notifying members of the general public of potential opportunities ... (It is) important in every phase of mobilization and strategic interaction with elites or targets" (p. 92).

The creation of a collective consciousness - a view of a situation consistent with that of the larger movement - is essential for effective participation of members in an insurgency.

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) agree that shared values are important in maintaining participation. "Groups defining conditions as social problems may be sustained by interests or values, or a combination of them" (p. 88). Much research has been conducted regarding how participation (an important indigenous resource) is maintained. This issue was addressed above with regard to the effects of participation in a social action organization. There is no simple answer to the question of means to increase the

indigenous resources of a group. It is a complex issue. However, the participation of members in a social movement is necessary for a successful mobilization effort.

*Strategic position* refers to the leverage that a particular group may have. Those with very little leverage - such as excluded groups - are less successful in their bid to change social structures. Those who live in poverty, it would seem, have less leverage. "Protests by the unemployed and welfare recipients have little significance other than temporarily disturbing the tranquillity of a few marginal governmental agencies" (Jenkins, 1985, p. 13). "(The) capacity to create political crises through disrupting institutions ...is the chief resource for political influence possessed by the poor" (Piven & Cloward, 1972, p. 70-71). An assessment of the political position of those involved in the social movement can reveal their situation and at times offer suggestions as to appropriate mechanisms for dissent.

*Strategies of mobilization* refer to ongoing organizing and mobilizing strategies. A formal organization increases how readily a movement can mobilize and the amount of flexibility available to the movement. Staggenborg (1989) compared the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal structures within social movement organizations (SMO's). She concluded that "different types of SMO's make different contributions to the 'success' of a social movement" (p. 90), but that both formal and informal organizations serve a purpose.

According to Jenkins (1985), one of the major contributions can be made by a professional or full time paid organizer (as opposed to a natural leader who is valuable in other ways within the group). An organizer is able to sustain the momentum of a movement and often has a higher commitment to the cause. He/she is able to tap external resources as well as those within the group itself. Organizers are also important in prioritizing the resources and actions of the group.

It has been found that bloc recruitment (smaller groups are asked to join the larger organization for the purpose of participating in a social movement) is more successful in "building a group's indigenous solidarities and culture" than is individual recruitment (Jenkins, 1985, p. 14). These "bloc" groups can be transformed into active units within the movement and serve to increase the success of any given insurgency.

It is also important for the movement to have available external resources such as the media and financial sources. "The image of protest groups in newspapers can influence the rate of growth of a movement by creating a specific picture of the organization in the eyes of potential recruits" (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 21).

Strategies for mobilizing a social movement - the participation of formal and informal social movement organizations, a full-time organizer, a method of recruitment and available external resources such as the media and financial support - are important to the success of a social movement.

*Structure of political alignments* refers to the type of relationships that a social movement can develop with various political groups. In a democratic country such as Canada, especially near the time of an election, opposition political parties may be willing to support an insurgency. "The scope of these realignments determines the scale and duration of the opportunities (for action)" (p. 17). Gelb (1987) concurs with this assessment. "External factors - particularly political systems and culture - help both to explain social movement goals and structure and to determine their impact" (p. 286). As suggested above, the "life" of a social movement is greatly influenced by external factors, especially alignment with political parties.

The current theory regarding social movements implies that what is most important is to evaluate the process of that social movement. Jenkins (1985) has outlined a resource mobilization theory which incorporates that process with factors that he believes are important for a successful insurgency. Other investigators have confirmed



some of his hypotheses (Gelb, 1987; Mueller, 1987; Staggenborg, 1989). The important factors to be considered in evaluating the potential for success of a social movement include: the potential for mobilization, the strategic position of the dissenting group, the strategies used to mobilize participants and an evaluation of the political climate at the time of the proposed insurgency.

Social movement theory has progressed considerably from a victim blaming stance to one that evaluates the potential for mobilization according to the resources and structures that are available for a social movement. With the use of a framework such as that suggested by Jenkins (1985), it is possible to evaluate the processes and outcomes of a social movement.

Thus far in this research, the theory regarding the potential for MOMC as a self-help/mutual aid organization to empower the members of that organization has been discussed. In addition, the potentially *empowering* effects of participation in a social action organization have been outlined. Both the history and theory of social movements imply that there is also potential for MOMC to be an *empowered* organization - one that has "a voice" and some legitimate power in the political arena of a larger social movement. However, one further question was posed by the group members: Are we being successful? To that end, it is important at this point to define what success means.

#### *Toward a Definition of Success*

As a self-help/mutual aid organization, success implies that the members of MOMC are empowered by their participation to take control of their own lives. By participation in the activities, both self-help and social action, they would be able to participate more fully in the community, believe that they have a "say" in what happens in their community, experience a sense of community and greater self confidence, gain new information and experience greater involvement. In short the experience of

empowerment poses the question: "Rather than focusing entirely on the perception of power, did the group actually succeed in improving quality of life or capacity for self determination?" (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 75).

Jenkins (1985) outlines the criteria for the success of a social movement. Success is indicated by changes in the structure of social power through alteration in the content of official decisions or through the way that decisions are made or by the redistribution of socially valuable goods - economic resources, social privilege and/or political power (pp. 19-21).

Mueller (1987) suggests a further definition of success. She views the success of a movement in terms of its potential to be recycled as a resource for a second movement (p. 91). "Most successful outcomes provide generalized resources for future mobilization" (p. 90). She views the potential for future insurgency as a criterion for success. She also emphasizes that changes in consciousness are an indication of success.

For the purposes of this research, the criteria for success will include all of the factors included above. Success implies that the members are empowered, through participation in mutual aid activities and community development and social action activities, to take control of their own lives. The organization, MOMC, would be viewed as empowered if changes in the structure of social power resulted from their actions within the social movement and if there is potential for future mobilization.

### **Research Context**

#### ***Empowerment Research***

The current theoretical context does not include a perspective on social movements within poverty groups which incorporates the ecological perspective or the empowerment perspective, nor are there research results available which integrate multiple levels of analysis.

Zimmerman (1990) clearly articulates the goal of empowerment research: "to build bridges across levels of analysis so we can fully understand the contextual and individual qualities that converge to form empowerment theory" (p. 169). He suggests that qualitative approaches such as in-depth case histories that focus on not only the individual level of analysis but also on environmental influences, organizational factors and social, cultural or political contexts (p.173) are a "starting point for our repertoire of research methods" for the study of empowerment (p. 175). For these reasons, this research will incorporate the ecological perspective, an empowerment perspective, and multiple levels of analysis.

#### ***Philosophical Considerations In Research***

Many authors in recent years have been very critical of research done with those who live in poverty (Goldstein & Sachs, 1984; Holman, 1987; Lord, Schnarr, & Hutchison, 1987). As Goldstein and Sachs (1984) so succinctly put it, "poverty is the rich man's cow" (p. 6). Many have profited from research about the poor, but very few of the poor have benefited from that research.

"In most cases research 'chases' money. Research seldom directs how money should be spent in poverty programs, but poverty research can be found wherever poverty spending is found" (Dobelstein, 1987, p. 1).

Holman (1987) contends that research should be done "by or with the poor", they should benefit from it and they should not be powerless with regard to what is done with it (p. 670). He also believes that research from the "underside" can "help some members to shape services in the way they want, to express their needs and demands and to campaign for their purposes" (p.682). There has been much written recently about the philosophical shift in research investigations that involve complex issues. It is strongly suggested by feminist researchers and by many in community psychology that an approach be taken that involves participants in the research in a collaborative relationship and that the research should be useful to those participants (Gil, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lord et al., 1987; Patton, 1980; Price & Cherniss, 1977). It has been of utmost importance then that this research involve the members of Mothers and Others Making Change in a collaborative relationship and that the research, both the process and the outcome of the research itself, be useful to them.

Further to this, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) seek to critique action research as lacking in creativity, appreciation and growth. They believe that "*organizing is a miracle* of cooperative human interaction, of which there can never be a final explanation" (p. 162). They conclude that there is a need for a multidimensional view of action research which incorporates both the generation of theories and the development of organizations (p. 130). Theories, they argue, are a force that can be utilized to positively construct society through the "enlightenment effect" - once the theory has been proposed, human beings can act to either disconfirm or validate it. This effect is "an essential ingredient making scientific work worthwhile, meaningful and applicable" (p. 148). They believe that:

"A new theory allows one to see the world in a way perhaps never before imagined ... it provides a potential means for members of a culture to navigate in an otherwise neutral, meaningless, or chaotic sea of people, interactions and events ... Social organizational research is ... a continuing moral concern, a concern of social reconstruction and direction ... one means of humanity helping itself" (p. 141-148).

Both action and theory are important components in creating a world that is responsive to human beings. They argue that not only is it important to develop theories about activities (in this case the self-help, organizational and social movement activities of MOMC) but it is also important to act upon those theories - to prove, disprove and/or develop them. In this way research serves both to develop useful theories of the "*miracle of organizing*" and to be useful to those involved in either present or future activities of the organization.

Given this critique of research and theory, this research sought to incorporate the following philosophy:

- 1) Research is a cooperative effort between researcher and participants; their values and intentions coincide.
- 2) The researcher's role is to give to as opposed to take from the setting.
- 3) Participants in the research are capable of intelligent self direction; they have the knowledge; they can describe their ideas, beliefs and experiences from their own point of view.
- 4) People's lives and experiences are diverse; each person's situation and his/her environment are part of that individual's context.
- 5) Realities are multiple, unique and holistic (encompass all that individual is).
- 6) Research is not value free. An awareness of the values of the researcher and of the respondents is part of the research process.
- 7) Research is stimulated by community need. The product of the research is for the use of community groups.
- 8) Research is a tool for social action.
- 9) The theories that may emerge from research are valuable contributions to developing positive ideas about humanity.

#### *The Use of Qualitative Research*

Because the context within which the study of the empowering and empowered effects of involvement in social action and mutual aid activities is complex, it was essential that the research be qualitative in nature. Goldstein and Sachs (1984) suggest

that if one is uncertain about the "domain within which the answers to our research questions exist ... (then) qualitative (or "open") forms of data collection are not only appropriate, they are necessary" (p. 119).

This rationale is also endorsed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who recommend the use of naturalistic inquiry or the case study method to evaluate a problem - "a state of affairs resulting from the interaction of two or more factors" - rather than a question (p. 226). Their criteria for the use of naturalistic paradigm include: multiple complex constructions, the existence of multiple social realities, a large degree of context dependence, and a lack of single or simple causative factors and values that are crucial to the outcome (pp. 229-231). The questions posed regarding the processes and outcomes of the experiences of MOMC meet all of these criteria. There are multiple ways to view both the process and the outcomes; their context includes many social realities; there is no simple answer to the questions; and the values held by both the participants and the researcher are essential to the outcome of the investigation.

Chesler (1991) further encourages the use of participatory action research as most appropriate for research with self-help groups because the philosophy fits well with the goals of those groups.

"The principles underlying participatory action research fit quite well with the hoped-for goals of self-help group involvement: member/informant participation in the design and operation of activities, local and grass-roots orientation, freedom from professional control, opportunities to learn new skills, participation in new social processes, attaining outcomes of consciousness raising and empowerment." (Chesler, 1991, p. 765)

A more traditional approach to this research which may involve a researcher/participant relationship based on superiority and inferiority and alleged value free attitudes with an a priori hypothesis would have defeated the purpose of the research. The research was designed to explore answers to questions that were posed by

and are useful to the participants. Qualitative methods are the most appropriate for this investigation.

Although an intensive literature review was undertaken and a framework for the research was suggested, this was not intended to provide any a priori hypotheses for this investigation. Rather, this process was intended to highlight the "gaps" that exist in the literature and to provide a direction for the research. In addition, this process served to emphasize the philosophical and cognitive background of the investigator which, despite objections to the contrary, does influence any investigation undertaken. By outlining the current state of understanding, the researcher developed a better appreciation of her own biases and gained deeper insight into the area under study.

The use of qualitative research for this study not only implies that the method of data collection was qualitative but also that the reasoning in the data analysis was qualitative. The analysis has been inductive; it allows for new ideas and new perspectives to emerge; there was an openness to developing new ideas.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is the model or theory from which the researcher works. It consists of some general notions or research questions he or she is trying to answer. This research was formulated then as a multilevel, multimethod, complex analysis of the processes and outcomes of the activities of MOMC. It can be viewed as a matrix of interconnecting questions about these processes and outcomes.

While discussing the proposed research with the membership of MOMC, they posed several questions which they wanted to have answered through this investigation.

These include:

- Are we making change?
- Are we being a support?
- How can we not be "put under" by politics?
- How can we increase our strength and efficiency?
- Are we meeting needs?

The questions were focused at the individual level, at the organizational level and at the societal level. The members of the group wanted answers to all of these questions.

There were two basic questions to be addressed by the research:

***Has Mothers and Others Making Change been an empowering organization?***

- have the members come to believe that they are powerful participants in the community?
- what was it about participation in MOMC that enabled/did not enable the members to believe in their own power?

***Has Mothers and Others Making Change been an empowered organization?***

- were there changes in the structure of social power related to the actions of the members and/or their affiliation with other organizations?
- is future mobilization possible because of the creation of a collective consciousness?
- have they been able to make changes within the community in public awareness, political alignments, and physical, social and economic conditions in the community?
- what was it about the organization and/or actions of the group that lead to this successful/ unsuccessful outcome?



If one were to compare the way in which the members of MOMC view their group (sources include both input at an MOMC meeting and Purposes, Goals and Objectives, 1988) with a theoretical model derived from a review of the literature, the major difference one would note would be in language. The result of a combination of these two perspectives yields a model which focuses on the various activities in which MOMC is involved and outlines what the purposes or desired outcomes of these actions are. This model will be used as a conceptual framework for this research. Included in the following table are the means by which each of the levels will be evaluated as well as the issues to be addressed at each level. The table is divided into sections which deal with the question concerning the individually empowering aspects of the group and with the question regarding the empowered status of the group. The process and outcome for each of three levels (individual, organizational and social movement) is described as well as the sources for the data that are to be obtained for each level.

**TABLE 1 - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

<b>PROCESS (activities) [SOURCE OF DATA]</b>	<b>OUTCOME (results) [SOURCE OF DATA]</b>
<b><i>EMPOWERING?</i></b>	
<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-offered advocacy and choice</li><li>-mutual aid activities</li><li>-share information</li><li>-experience acceptance/value</li><li>-experience support</li><li>-social action activities</li><li>-socialize with peers</li><li>[members / minutes]</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-<i>feel</i> more powerful</li><li>-participate in the community</li><li>-develop a collective consciousness</li><li>-increased skills and knowledge</li><li>-increased self-esteem</li><li>-feel supported</li><li>-increased personal relationships</li><li>-enjoy participation</li><li>[members/minutes]</li></ul>
<b><i>EMPOWERED?</i></b>	
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-local social actions highlighting issues</li><li>-public education</li><li>-networking</li><li>-increase resources</li><li>[members, minutes, local community members]</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-increased leverage in community</li><li>-changes in local political alignments</li><li>-increased public awareness</li><li>-increased participation</li><li>-increased power/numbers</li><li>[members, minutes, local community members, politicians]</li></ul>
<b>SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-province-wide social actions (marches, rallies)</li><li>-activities aimed at mobilizing resources</li><li>-acquiring resources</li><li>-creating an inclusive network</li><li>-encouraging participation</li><li>-developing external resources</li><li>-inclusion of many organizations</li><li>-examining political climate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-content and process of decisions made include views of group</li><li>-more equitable distribution of services</li><li>-increase in power/privilege for poor</li><li>-creation of a collective consciousness</li><li>-potential for further mobilization</li><li>[members, members of OCAP politicians]</li></ul>

### **The Researcher/Participant Relationship**

As mentioned above, I have been involved with MOMC for three years. Before the research process began, I had begun the process of "prolonged engagement", which is viewed as a valuable asset to the credibility and trustworthiness of both the research and the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I believe that, despite the fact that I am at times viewed as an expert because of my status as graduate student, for the most part my relationship with the members of MOMC is collaborative in nature. I am prevented from full participation in the group because I do not live in poverty and therefore can only experience it through the members of the group. However, since I have been accepted as a collaborative and supportive member of the group, I can experience some of the relationships and successes and/or failures that the group may encounter. The relationship has been established as a cooperative, open and trusting one.

This relationship between myself and the members of MOMC has been a long process. As pointed out by Chesler (1991), the relationship with the members of a self-help group is not always an easy one.

"Meaningful access to the private lives of people suffering from an illness, or from some socially stigmatized condition, is a matter of carefully negotiated privilege. It is not easy to get, is delicate to maintain, and generally implies some reciprocal moral or ethical exchange." (p. 765).

In this research project, the aim has been to maintain that privileged, collaborative relationship at the same time that a new relationship - that of researcher-participant - was established. The members of the group and those who were interviewed have at all times been aware of the purpose of my research and of my role as researcher. This was accomplished both through presentations to the group as a whole and through explanation at the beginning of each interview. In addition, I have

continued to attend most group meetings in a supportive function. The relationship has continued to be positive as the research has progressed.

Involving the participants in the research has also been an important part of the relationship between myself and the participants. The view of the members of MOMC is that any work that students do with their organization is valuable and useful because it gives them a perspective that they may not have considered before. They are most cooperative with any students with whom they have contact. However, in order to achieve the goal of usefulness for the results of this research, it was important to involve the participants in order that they may "own the process". This was achieved through a collaborative process. The opinions of the members were sought once the preliminary direction had been established. Through meetings with both the group as a whole and with the president and vice-president of the organization separately, a collaborative relationship was begun. Any other interested members of the group were invited to join the initial meeting held with the president and vice-president and although three members indicated interest in this process, none attended the meeting. Ongoing feedback both from myself and from the participants has been established through presentation of the project to the group, through open requests for their feedback, and through consultation with the president and vice-president of the organization as research advisors.

### **Data Collection**

The questions addressed in this research project related directly to the organization Mothers and Others Making Change. Both the process and outcome of individual's involvement in the group and the process and outcome of the group's involvement in the community, in the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and in the

province have been addressed. Multiple sources of information were necessary to adequately respond to such a multi-level and complex investigation. For this reason, many sources of information were tapped for information regarding process and outcome. These include:

- interviews with seven members of MOMC who have been actively involved since the beginning of the group.
- interviews with three members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty who have been involved at least since July of 1988.
- interviews with two members of the New Democratic Party, one of whom was involved in the Campaign Against Poverty.
- interviews with three persons who are familiar with social policy at the provincial level.
- interviews with six persons involved in the social services network in Kitchener-Waterloo.
- interview with a member of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
- interview with an elected official (a member of the Liberal Party) at the time of the implementation of the first stage of the Social Assistance Review Committee report.
- a review of the archival data contained in the minutes of the meetings of MOMC and in the newsletters which have been published by MOMC. Although the minutes of some of the initial meetings were not available, those that were available were analyzed.

Each method of data collection sought to answer separate questions posed by this research proposal. As is outlined in the results section, there were divergent views given by many of those who were interviewed. This allowed for the emergence of multiple perspectives and certainly created some interesting ideas. The responses are multi-level.

Although from the above description of those who were interviewed it would seem that a total of 23 interviews were conducted, only 16 people actually participated in the research. The roles of many of those who were interviewed overlapped so that a member of the local community social services network may also, for example, be involved at the provincial level. Another example would be a member of MOMC who

has also been involved with OCAP. This purposive selection of participants with multiple roles served to broaden the scope of this research.

The sample included members of MOMC who had been involved in the organization almost from its inception. Because the focus of this research was on empowerment, and empowerment takes time to develop, the length of time that those who were interviewed had been involved with the group was an important consideration. Those who had been involved in the group for the longest period of time were those chosen for interviewing for this research project. This sampling technique may have missed the perspectives of those who had been involved for less time and of those who were dissatisfied with the organization and were therefore, no longer involved.

The interviewing process with the members of MOMC was initiated and coded on an ongoing basis. When the results of the interviews began to indicate that no new categories of data were emerging, two final interviews with the president and vice-president of the organization were conducted. The purpose of these final two interviews was to ensure that there were no new categories emerging from the data and also to enable as complete a history of the organization as was possible.

In the process of the interviews, one factor was particularly evident. Of those who were interviewed, nine were male and only seven were female. MOMC is an organization led by women and which has a feminist perspective in that the issues with which they deal are feminist issues (e.g. poverty and oppression). For this reason, it would seem important that those with whom they are aligned be female. However, the members of the group do not see themselves as "feminists", but as "humanists" and for this reason, all are accepted and appreciated. The fact that there were more males than females interviewed was interesting and simply worthy of noting.

*Interviews With Members*

Interviews were conducted with seven members of MOMC who have been involved with the group from as near the beginning as possible. Two of the members interviewed had also been involved with Mothers Making Change, the group from which Mothers and Others Making Change evolved. Both the president and vice-president of the organization were also interviewed. Those who were interviewed were those who have remained loyal to the group over a long period of time. This was intentional in that their perspective on the history of MOMC and on the impact it has had on their lives was a major focus of this research. However, this sampling method did eliminate the voices of the "silent majority", those who have been involved in the group for less time or who left the group for some reason. The results then, reflect the views of long-standing members of the organization.

All of the participants were most willing to be interviewed and none asked that anything they said not be used. As a matter of fact, many said that I could identify them and what they said regardless of the need for ethical practice. Although anonymity was guaranteed, when the members received a computer-generated copy of their interview, many freely shared them with other members. The feedback that was received regarding the interview process was positive. One member commented:

"I was glad I could help, I was glad the ideas were there that I could express some of the ideas and maybe through expressing some of those ideas, I could get in your final report, get something that somebody else, they probably have not seen or not seen in the same way because each person has their own private view of their living conditions."

Another simply stated: "It wasn't uncomfortable, I didn't find it intrusive."

One member expressed that the interview had made her feel important because she had been able to tell a friend that she was busy that day because she had an interview. "So there! I'm important enough for somebody to want to interview me!"

The interviews followed the format outlined in appendix A. The interviews were for the purpose of eliciting the views, feelings and beliefs of group members about the impact that MOMC has had on their lives and about the processes that may have been involved in that impact. In addition, questions were asked regarding their views of the influence on the social system of the social actions in which they were involved and about any changes in their views about poverty. The interview format proved to be adequate for the interviews although some probing was necessary with regards to questions about values and beliefs regarding poverty.

Most of the participants received a copy of the questions before the interview, although some interviews were scheduled so quickly that this was not possible. This practice allowed for accuracy and an opportunity for the participants to consider some of the questions at their leisure. The process also seemed to relax and prepare the participants before the interview. They found that I was not about to ask them about something that they did not know.

The questions were open-ended and in-depth and were conducted using a conversational style but guided by the interview format. Although the participants were given the option to do so, none refused to answer any questions. All of the interviews were conducted in a relaxed and comfortable environment - in all but one interview, the participant's home was the venue of the interview. It was mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participant that the other interview take place in the researcher's home as the participant was already familiar with that environment.

Six of the seven participants requested that a typed transcript of their interview be given to them. These were given to the members who were interviewed and, as noted above, were often shared. None chose to alter their responses.

The members who were interviewed were selected according to the length of their involvement with MOMC. Those who were involved at or near the beginning were



interviewed first. The president and vice-president were asked for names of people who may be appropriate to be interviewed. The group as a whole was asked for permission for the interviewer to contact them and none refused. All of those who were contacted had given permission. In addition, all of the members knew the researcher before the research began and had established some relationship with me. Phone numbers were obtained and the participant was contacted directly. This allowed for increased anonymity because none of the members knew who would be interviewed. The president and vice-president are the longest standing members and they were interviewed last as a means of checking their perceptions against those of other group members and to allow the researcher to "fill in any gaps" in the history or understanding of the group.

Of the seven members interviewed, five were female and two were male. This approximates the composition of the group although the number of male members varies at any given time.

In summary then, the interviews conducted with the members were well accepted, open and comfortable. The response to them was positive. All possible attempts to maintain confidentiality were maintained.

*Interviews With Politicians, Members of OCAP and Community Social Service Members at the Provincial and Local Levels*

Interviews were conducted with three members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, with five members of the local social service network, with one member of Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC), with three people at the provincial social services level, with two NDP politicians and one Liberal party member. A snowball sampling technique which was also purposive in nature was used to solicit the participants for these interviews. Some participants made suggestions about who else may be appropriate to be interviewed.

Contact was made directly with those who were to be interviewed. In two situations, it was suggested that I interview another person within the organization which had been contacted, because it was believed that they would be more helpful to the process. None resisted being interviewed and all were helpful and cooperative with the process of the interview.

Whenever possible, the participants were given the outline of the questions to be asked during the interview to enable them to think through their responses and therefore offer a more thoughtful response. (See Appendices B, C, & D for outlines of the interview format used.) Participants in these interviews were also offered a typed transcript of their interview from which they could choose to add or delete. Three of those interviewed received a copy of their interview but none made any changes to it.

#### *Archival Data From Minutes of the Meetings Prepared By MOMC*

Archival sources provided some data for this research. The use of archival data has important advantages. It is economical and not subject to problems with reactivity of participants. It was important for some of the data to be triangulated with other sources of data because of concerns with regard to unreliability and systematic biases which may result from those being interviewed and/or the researcher. The purpose of reviewing this archival data was to yield answers to questions about both the processes and outcomes at all levels of analysis (see Table 1, page 43). Pertinent minutes of MOMC meetings were transcribed and then content analyzed (see below).

This source of data did not yield as much information as was originally anticipated because of the nature of the minutes that were taken. Because of the very personal nature of many of the discussions at MOMC meetings, these are not included in the minutes that are taken. Most of the information available from this source was about resource people who had attended the group's meeting or about demonstrations

in which the group was being invited to participate. More personal data about discussions were not available. The minutes did, however, serve to triangulate some results regarding the process of the meetings.

It was originally thought that newspapers would provide a rich source of data as well. However, although many articles were reviewed, the participants gave as much data as was available through their use. It was decided in conjunction with the thesis advisor that this process was not necessary other than to corroborate some very specific issues.

The sources of data for this research included then interviews with members of MOMC, members of the social service community, members of OCAP, members of the NDP and Liberal parties, and minutes of meetings of MOMC.

### *Interview Process*

The instrumentation for these interviews was human -the researcher herself. As an interviewer, I have had extensive experience throughout my career. As a Public Health Nurse, a Children's Aid worker, a psychiatric nurse and a Home Care coordinator, I have interviewed people on a daily basis for nearly 15 years. However, because interviewing in a research capacity is different from that in a "helping" capacity, it was useful to review the initial interview with my thesis advisor for a more objective evaluation of the skills required for interviewing in the research context.

All of the interviews were tape recorded to enable verbatim transcripts to be made for data analysis and for sending for review to the various participants. This allowed the format of the interview to be more casual in that extensive notes were not taken during the interview time. All of the tapes were transcribed either by the researcher or by a research assistant. The researcher reviewed all of the tapes in conjunction with the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and to begin the analysis process.

### Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was inductive as opposed to deductive. Although a conceptual framework was introduced before data collection began, this framework was not used in the analysis of the results. Rather, a process of categorization of statements made by the participants was initiated without prior categories for this analysis being developed. In moving toward a theory as opposed to having a theory direct the conclusions reached, a careful process was followed. Hypotheses were generated from the data about what the processes and outcomes might be. The goal was to bring order to the data - to look for patterns, categories and basic descriptive units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analysis was an ongoing process in this qualitative research project. The researcher moved back and forth between the data and analysis.

Data were evaluated on an ongoing basis with the use of summary sheets and a reflexive journal (a recording of ideas, hunches and personal responses) in the early stages and code notes and data analysis in the latter stages. Initially, a reflexive journal was kept to enable a trail to be left regarding the process of the research for data analysis. This journal was used to record insights, hunches, doubts and feelings. However, the interviews began to flow smoothly and the information being obtained was being analyzed on an ongoing basis. Although the reflexive journal was helpful in the initial stages, it became unnecessary very quickly. The summary sheets (see appendix E) were also useful in the initial stages but became less so as more data were analyzed.

The interviews were transcribed as they were completed. After approximately eight of the interviews were conducted, a process of data analysis began on each interview. During the coding stage of the analysis, the initial interviews were listened to and notes were made about the interview itself - basic perceptions, perspectives and

attitude. This comprised the beginning of the code notes but categories soon began to emerge. This process left a "trail" that could be followed by a collaborator in the research process. It also served to increase the dependability of the method of coding and to verify that the biases of the researcher were not interfering with the credibility of the results.

Categories emerged from the data and were recorded on code notes. Strauss and Corbin (1990) served as a further reference for this system of data analysis. First, the data was "open coded", a process whereby each response was categorized by the researcher. Then, a process of "axial coding" whereby larger descriptive categories emerged, was utilized. The remaining interviews were coded according to the system that had emerged from the original coding process. At this point, some new categories did emerge and were incorporated into the existing system. By the time the last two interviews with the president and vice-president were conducted, the categories were saturated and no new categories emerged. This proved to be an efficient system of data analysis.

It was important in the hypothesis generation phase of the analysis to include the research participants in the generation of theory from the data - to "check out" if they have alternative points of view. The members of MOMC were asked to collaborate in this process. Any of the members who were willing, were asked to read and comment on the results that had been coded and on the categories that emerged. Five members participated in this process. Shortly after this, the results were fed back to the entire group at a series of weekly meetings held at the support and information centre. This process consisted of five separate short presentations and longer discussions. The group discussed the results as they emerged and a list was made of issues that the group wished to address in different ways in the near future. These issues have been included in the results section of this thesis. This process involved five weeks because of the

lengthy discussions but also because the membership in attendance changed from week to week and those who were not there one week were "caught up" at the beginning of the next week.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that in a naturalistic study one must pay attention to establishing the trustworthiness of the data as opposed to more traditional concerns about reliability and validity. Attention has been paid throughout this research to the issues of trustworthiness. The criteria for trustworthiness include: credibility (through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation - multiple methods and multiple sources, peer debriefing, member checks, negative case analysis, the reflexive journal and thick description), transferability (through thick description and the reflexive journal), dependability and confirmability (through the audit trail and reflexive journal). All of these techniques have been included in this research and, I believe, yield a product that is trustworthy.

### **Ethical Issues**

As in all research, the confidentiality of the participants needs to be and has been protected. Neither the names of those who were interviewed nor any other identifying information was used in the recording or in the reporting of the results of this research. The exception to this is the response of the president and vice-president of MOMC. Their responses to some questions seemed important to identify as coming from them and the members often mentioned them during the interviews. For these reasons, permission was sought and willingly granted to identify them by name or by

response whenever necessary. Both of them have read the completed thesis and commented on it before it was submitted for acceptance. Their confidentiality has been protected as much as they wish it to be. (See appendix F for signed permission to use the names of the president and vice-president of the organization.)

All participants were given a choice about their participation in the research. The tapes were destroyed at the conclusion of the research. The transcripts are on computer in my home with no identification attached to them. The only way to identify the participants is to find a list which has been made to connect the computer transcripts to the participants. This is safely stored.

The risk to the participants was non-existent. Many commented that the interview was a good opportunity for them to review for themselves their knowledge and opinions about the process of change and about MOMC. All responded willingly.

### **Research Potential**

As noted above, this research has the potential for being useful to many members of the community. It could give insight as a multidisciplinary, multilevel source of emerging theory into the concepts of organization, social action, community development and mutual aid as they relate to the concept of empowerment. As well, it has the potential to broaden our views of these concepts. This research can provide a basis for further research into this multidimensional area of study. It has the potential to both generate theory and develop the organization (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 130).

The social, theoretical and research contexts have been explored and the research methods presented. Now the results and a discussion of those results will be offered.

## **RESULTS: THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MOMC**

The basic questions that were posed for this research were: "*Is Mothers and Others Making Change an empowering organization?*" and "*Is Mothers and Others Making Change an empowered organization?*". In keeping with these two questions, the results and discussion for each of these questions will be separately presented. First, a definition of the organization and a brief history of the group will be presented. Next, the results of the research from the perspective of the individuals within the context of MOMC will be offered, followed by a discussion of those results. The results for the organization within the context of the larger society will then be presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions will be offered.

### **What Is MOMC? The View of The Members**

The members of Mothers and Others Making Change clearly defined what their organization is. The goals of the group as a social/political action group are evident. All of the members interviewed identified the goal of creating change in the system through raising the awareness of those in government.

"MOMC is a grassroots group, we try to do a lot of changes - social political... (to) change the way people think about poverty... and to try to make the politicians change the system."

The members also indicated that they want to change public opinion about those who live in poverty. They believe that the general public's view of them is as "drunks, derelicts and the scourge of society" and that this is not how they want to be labelled. "We're trying to improve ... what (people) think about poor people."



MOMC is also seen as an advocacy group in which members become educated about their rights, have support in exercising those rights and fight for those rights if necessary.

"I think the group is about gaining rights. Rights that have always been there but have been abolished either by the people themselves or by society in general. To me that is the main purpose, to identify rights that belong to us as a sector of society and to exercise our rights, fight for our rights, and certainly make other people aware that they have these rights as well."

Members of Mothers and Others Making Change explained further that their organization is also there for support until members are able to gain their self-respect. They mentioned the fact that clothing and food are available at MOMC. This was viewed as a further means of support for the members. "We're there to give assistance where needed but be a support system until they get back on their feet and gain their self respect."

Probably the best description of the goals of MOMC was given by a member who felt very strongly about the humanistic and sharing approach taken by the group: "...to make living in poverty as painless as possible, to make it as humanistic as possible."

MOMC then, is a grassroots, non-profit organization which engages in social action as a political means to improve the lives of people living below the poverty line and as a means to raise community and political awareness about issues that affect the poor. Through self-help/mutual aid and advocacy activities, the members are offered support and gain knowledge and confidence in their ability to gain some control over their own lives.

## The History of Mothers and Others Making Change

### *The Beginning*

MOMC has been in existence in one form or another for approximately seven years. The predecessor of Mothers and Others Making Change was a group called Mothers Making Change (MMC) which was initiated by the Waterloo Regional Social Services department as a response to an identified need in the community. "MMC was founded by people who felt they needed an outlet for mothers to gain information and access to information in the community."

Some of the community members were able to offer a long-term perspective on the emergence and maintenance of the group. One community member in particular believes that the organization has "a life of its own." This person emphasized the continuity of the group and believes that regardless of leadership and changes, the group will continue to work in very positive ways in the community.

"The leadership of the group is changed on a regular basis in MOMC but I think there has been a consistency in terms of the purpose ... I think that's the strength of the organization ... that the purpose is clear enough and that by people helping other people when you're both in the same boat, that even if you change the organization again and again ... the purpose will still keep on going."

The president of Mothers and Others Making Change shares this view. She believes that, regardless of the leadership or of the membership, MOMC will continue.

"I think that if I leave MOMC, it will just keep going. I think somebody will just pick it right up. I do. If I was to just walk away from it, somebody would just continue on with MOMC. I think it's here to stay."

Community members identified some of the positives that have emerged from the group over the years. Several participants mentioned the names of former members who are now working in the area of human services in Kitchener-Waterloo: "...some of us who've been around for more than 10 years are seeing that some good community leaders have emerged out of MOMC."

"It was a natural group that came together around a specific issue... There has been some major changes in the personnel in the group. Some of the people have used the group as I think, a stepping stone to what I think the main stream of society would call 'bigger and better things'."

Another community member also saw many of the positives that resulted from the work of those involved in the organization over the years. This participant specifically remembers the formation of MMC and some of the projects in which that group was involved.

"It was exciting to see it grow from a number of individuals who shared some common interests to a group working together for a common purpose. Some exciting things came out of it. The video, *Mother Hubbard's Got Nothing On Us* (which the group produced), is sensational. I think it's exciting to see that (a member) was chosen to be part of the Social Assistance Review Committee."

The group it would seem has been fairly consistent in working together over the years and has produced some lasting effects in the community in terms of leadership and input into the system.

*The Transition: Mothers Making Change to Mothers and Others Making Change*

The transition of Mothers Making Change to Mothers and Others Making Change was an interesting process that is viewed by those who were interviewed from different perspectives. Those community members who were involved in the group in the early stages state that the original purpose was for the group to become independent of Regional Social Services.

"(The) early goal was a group that would become independent of the Social Services department exercising some purpose and function more readily as an independent organization."

Another view indicates that perhaps the change in the independence of the group was more political in nature.

"At some point they probably got active enough that it became incompatible to have a welfare rights group operating out of the welfare department. So they were spun off in the direction of the Social Planning Council ... (who) provided some support services through them and through the MSW students on placement with MOMC."

The view of two members who had been involved in Mothers Making Change and are also involved in MOMC, indicates that perhaps it was simply time for the group to move on and become more autonomous.

"There were no changes being made. It was getting people into schools, single parents into schools, and starting their life again ...but nobody was doing anything ... It just wasn't going anywhere. We had people that would come in and get discouraged and drop out ...There was no energy."

And from another member:

"The women just came for a place to go. The kids would get babysat upstairs and we would drink coffee and sit around and talk about things ...It was depicted on the front of the flyer by showing little coins. So it was mothers making change, teaching you how you could budget your money so you could be poor and still survive and make your money stretch."

For whatever reason, it had become obvious that a change was needed in the group. The membership was dwindling and there was no energy available to carry on. The plan was for the group to end.

### *The Picnic*

The transformation of MMC to MOMC was never purposefully planned. A picnic was to be arranged by the few remaining members of Mothers Making Change as a way of saying goodbye to each other and to the group. However, one member of the group, Carole Sillicker, who had accepted many responsibilities within the organization, felt differently. Having had some success with starting a country music radio station through an advertisement in the personals column of a newspaper, she decided to try this tactic again. She placed an advertisement in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record (July 8, 1988) which read simply:

"People on social assistance of any kind, mother's allowance, welfare, etc. older people that have lost businesses and are now receiving social assistance, sole support parents, call Carole \_\_\_\_\_."

One of the members vividly remembers feeling surprised when she read the advertisement in the personals column of the newspaper: "Why would anybody want to talk to somebody receiving social assistance?" The idea that she was a person that someone would want to talk to peaked her curiosity. She was not the only one who was curious about the advertisement.

The response in terms of phone calls to Carole was overwhelming. She states that she had 19 "suicide cases" that first week and was tremendously upset by the number of people who had stories to tell about their experiences.

"I started making plans for the picnic but when I went home that night I thought: 'Gee, this five months I've been coming here, I've learned that we're all in the same boat, we're all poor, and we've all got the same problems'. I didn't know the political aspect of it but I said: 'I wonder why people can't just get together and talk about these things and do something about it'. I didn't know what we could do about it, I just figured somebody could do something about it. So, I remembered that I went and got a radio station in London and I went and put an ad in the paper ... We got that station... and I thought why wouldn't it work for poor people? So I ... put an ad in the paper... That was the craziest thing I've ever done because I had 19 suicide cases the first week. They genuinely were going to kill themselves, they just wanted to say what was wrong before they went... I was on the phone morning, noon and night."

Those who called were invited to attend the picnic. In addition, Carole, having had contact with other organizations (such as Waterloo-Wellington Non-Profit Homes Inc. and Workers' Compensation) through her responses to those who had called, invited speakers to address the gathering.

The picnic was an absolute success. Over 150 people attended. There were speakers from Waterloo-Wellington Non-Profit Homes Inc., and from Workers' Compensation; a local political candidate spoke; and most importantly, those who lived in poverty who attended the picnic were able to get up before their peers and tell their

stories. The feelings of love, togetherness, desperation and hope were described by those who attended the picnic.

"It was the biggest picnic I ever saw. There was a lot of love there. There was a lot of togetherness there ... there were a lot of desperate people there too ...there was hope, that showed them hope ...Carole really made everybody believe that picnic was for us, it was for us. You knew it was to help us ...Everything was free!"

Some of those whom Carole had invited to the picnic when they called in response to the ad in the personals column were persuaded to get up in front of their peers and tell their story - for the first time in their lives.

"I had to get up and talk in front of all these people I didn't know ...It was nerve racking ...I had to tell them about myself, how I made my living, and being a single parent and all that. They videotaped it and other people got up and told the same thing ...what it's like being poor ... (I felt) that I wasn't alone. I mean I was at rock bottom back then, I didn't think it could get any worse. And I found out I wasn't the only one going through the same thing. It was nice to know there were others. That's why I joined... And it was nice to be able to talk to someone who knew what I was talking about."

All of those with whom I spoke who had attended the picnic spoke about the feeling of not being alone any more because they could hear their own story reflected in those who were speaking.

"I knew there was a lot of people in my circumstances but it was the first time that I went out and actually got to meet the people and also share my feelings, share my experiences with them, with other people that are in the same circumstances. It made you feel that you were not alone."

The picnic was the founding of the group that became Mothers and Others Making Change. The name was changed at about the time of the picnic to reflect the fact that there are more than just mothers who are struggling to survive in poverty.

The reporting of the event in the local newspaper, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record (July 11, 1988), identified that a more activist role would be taken by the group. The former president of MMC was quoted as saying: "We need to change our image ... We're not helpless. We want to be seen as equal, intelligent people who have had some misfortune happen to us..."

There seems to be some diversity of opinion about whether or not there was actually a change in the structure and function of Mothers Making Change when it became Mothers and Others Making Change. From a former member, the perspective is that they were significantly different.

"When I was going to Mothers Making Change, I thought everybody there was better than me... It was funded by the welfare department ... There was rules and regulations but they don't give you nothing! ... You're not really accomplishing anything. Where at MOMC, it was so diverse! There were so many different kinds of people ... in all aspects!"

A politician viewed it from a different perspective:

"They (MMC) went through a transition themselves. But essentially, their goals and their aspirations didn't change. They just structured themselves a little bit more tightly. They certainly enlarged their group. I think they got a better sense of who they were and what they were about. But I didn't get the sense over the years that their goals were any different."

Whether or not a change had occurred in the group, the members continued to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of poverty and to support one another. "And from there (the picnic) to now it has just been going up."

### *Early Meetings*

Following the picnic, the group met at St. James Lutheran Church in downtown Kitchener. They attempted to structure the group, assign leadership roles and to develop a crisis phone line for those who needed assistance.

"We met again, the group. It was very reduced by then. There was not everybody attended the picnic attended the meeting. We tried to organize the structure of the group, like take on leadership. I think it was the first or the second meeting where Carole delegated - or assigned, appointed - some of the so-called executive and we tried to form a kind of a crisis phone line where some of the members would be willing to take phone calls from other members that needed a shoulder to cry on. I was one of the volunteers. It worked for a bit and then it got to be too much."

Even in the beginning, the members shared what they had and felt welcomed into the group.

"So I went to the meeting after the picnic... and my brother-in-law was buying rotten fruit from a market and giving me what his family wouldn't use so that day I went to MOMC, I had bananas and apples ... and shared it with the people... (Being at that first meeting) was a little uncomfortable because I had never been through that sort of thing before. I knew everybody was in the same boat that I was in, that's why I brought the fruit... I felt welcomed, it was a warm place to be. Everybody was friendly ...there were no professionals there so I didn't have to watch my 'P's and Q's'."

There was an initial focus on enhancing the self-esteem of the members and on developing a sense of community within the group.

"That first three weeks I said if people have a feeling of belonging, they'll want to come. So I had to invent cards ....to give people self-esteem to make them feel important."

Contacts were made with various community people and organizations in order to gain information and resources. One community person expressed what she saw happening initially:

"They approached (an individual) in the initial stages of their own growth to ask for advice and help on how to get started, how to make contacts with people, what kind of grants were available. They had some very basic questions ... At that point the only needs ... expressed were immediate things like food and that sort of thing."

Carole began to talk to many people, about their opinions and about their resources:

"...she got a lot of opinions from outside people and she started getting into the higher up people. She started getting at them to get their opinion." She did not want to let anyone know that she was frightened of the people in the community.

"I was scared of these people (in the community) but I didn't let them know it and I didn't let the people know it. I had to make a stand for them. I had to say what they were thinking and feeling, that's why I had to do that ...I used to write them (community organizations) letters and go and see them about things that were bothering me - like the food, like the clothes."

Carole believes that she was very naive in the beginning. She thinks that she knew "absolutely nothing" in the beginning. She learned along with the members of the organization.



"One thing just lead to another and the membership - new faces just kept coming in and going all the time. It was just one issue after another. Even at the picnic ... I didn't know anything about politics, I couldn't even have told you who the Prime Minister of Canada was!... You went in grassroots green yourself and you learned with the people so it's better that you learned it with them. It was like we were a family that we were learning together. That's why there was no importance placed on me ...I was just out there walking among the people."

The members continued to meet and to share their stories and their problems.

The group began to question what action could be taken to try to solve their problems.

"We kept on meeting and every time we met, there were more testimonies of somebody who came to the meeting and talked about their problems and we started to organize as to what should we do, what could we do? Are we going to picket this or picket that or make the community aware - that was the big thing, trying to - the awareness of the community as to the problems that exist and why they exist."

A telephone call from the Day Care Coalition resulted in the members of the group attending their first of many demonstrations.

"(The Day Care Coalition) ...called and said they were going to have a demonstration and I said: 'Well, we'll do it with you.'... I ended up with a lot of people there. That was our first demonstration."

The members began to learn much more about the systems with which they were dealing. They began to understand why it was that people in the community viewed them as they did.

"We were learning that one system leads into another... How every one of these systems was affecting our lives. And we had no control! We just had no control. What we were trying to learn in MOMC was to take back control of our own lives. We can't do it, it's impossible, we're blocked but we can at least take control to a certain extent. The extent that we won't be walked on any more... We know what it is but we didn't know that it was because of rich people being greedy... They actually feel that they deserve to be where they are and we deserve to be where we are. It took us a year to learn that that's the way society was taught to think about us. So that nobody would feel bad that we were being hurt like we were. Nobody had to have a guilty conscience."

Having obtained some funding from the Secretary of State for the purpose of public education, the president and vice-president began speaking to groups in the area about the problems of those who live in poverty.

"In those days, we were not only running around bringing food to people, and picking people up and lobbying and rallying and picketing and demonstrating but we were steady, we were four to five days a week Jenny and I were going out speaking to churches, to universities and anything that came up... we were there, we were speaking, we were opening our mouths all over the place over every little thing that happened... We were busy! ...We were always in the papers or on TV or something. That helped to get us known too... We're known right straight across the country... We're in the women's almanac!"

In addition to networking with members of the community, the executive also became aware of a regional organization that was organizing at about the same time.

"There was another thing too. We had joined other organizations immediately. Like the March Against Poverty... We got a flyer and it was the National Anti-Poverty Organization, I had joined that ... we were getting information that was coming to Mothers Making Change from poverty groups... Mothers Making Change was known to other poverty groups because of SARC ...But they were getting information from other poverty groups and I didn't know that there was other poverty groups out there. As mail was coming in for Mothers Making Change, I was discovering that there was a national anti-poverty organization, there was a March Against Poverty, there's this, there's that. I contacted them all ...I just kept in touch with all these other organizations and I was learning through them because they would just send me all of their newsletters and we would send them ours ...Every issue that they could come up with was all problems that we were going through in MOMC. There was no difference. It was country-wide."

Initially the group decided that they would not become involved with the political system. It was not long before they were more involved than any of them had anticipated.

"The odd one knew what was going down, about capitalism, about politics. We first used to decide we will not get involved in politics. We will not! A couple of months later, we were voting the NDP's in. And had joined the Party to top it off. Every one of us. There wasn't one of us that was left out."

From the beginning, Mothers Making Change and then Mothers and Others Making Change has been an organization dedicated to helping single parents to make changes in their own lives. One can already begin to sense that some changes were made for some of the people who were involved in the group because they were able to become involved in the community in other capacities. Even the sense of connectedness

felt by those at the picnic and the sense of welcome expressed at the first meeting was enhancing for the members. The organization very early started mobilizing resources and joining with other organizations that they believed may be helpful in their search to create changes for the members of the organization.

The interviews conducted for this research project focused primarily on the organization Mothers and Others Making Change, so by necessity, this history is brief. At this point, the results will focus more directly on the individual members within the context of MOMC since its inception at that picnic in July of 1988. To begin, a description of the experience of living in poverty will be provided from the members point of view. Next, the effects of participation in the organization and the reasons the members believe those changes occurred will be outlined.

### **The Individual Within The Context of MOMC**

In reviewing the results of this research at the individual level of change, it is very difficult to put into words the emotion and the intensity with which the members responded about their experiences with Mothers and Others Making Change. It became clear that the only way to convey this intense emotion was to use the words of the members. What follows then is, in their own words, what the members of MOMC believe has happened to them and how they see this as happening.

#### ***The Experience of Poverty***

In the course of interviewing some of the members of MOMC, their feelings about living in poverty and particularly on social assistance, became evident. Feelings of fear, of hopelessness, of stigmatization, of guilt and depression and lack of confidence emerged from the interviews.

The fear was of many things: of being cut off from their only source of income, of creating problems for their children and of not having enough to eat. They often expressed fear of retaliation by the Social Services Department because of their involvement with Mothers and Others Making Change.

"There is a lot of scared people out there that need somebody like that... (You feel) alone, you become fearful for your kids... Poverty is fear...people fear poverty... because it's our fault to an extent maybe because we allow it."

The participants also said that they had a feeling of hopelessness, that once you were poor, that was the way you would stay. There was no hope for a better future.

"So if you're poor that's the way you stay and that's the way people want us to be...You know you're poor so you just go home and you be quiet because you are poor sort of thing. And don't bother anybody 'cause you're a poor person and you know that's the way you are going to stay the rest of your life... that's where we stay, okay. That's where we stay... because we're all poor people. We don't get to know anything or know anybody because we're poor and we're in this corner ... See that's the poverty part of it, what it brings with it."

Members were especially vocal about feelings of discrimination. One woman stated that she was so humiliated by the attitude of the staff at her son's school that she refused to leave her home for months after the incident. Others mentioned being discriminated against by doctors, by field workers and by landlords.

"There is a lot of injustice, there is a lot of discrimination because you are on welfare. The landlord, the housing problem is a big one. Landlords discriminate, it's their right to discriminate on a financial basis."

"I was starting to learn that the reason that I had to live in so many different places was that discrimination was against me. I thought it was me! I thought it was my fault! I just thought people didn't like me. I didn't know that landlords were discriminating against me because I was poor! So, I suffered all these atrocities ignorantly."

Participants also experienced feelings of "being a nobody", of accepting any label, as long as they became "somebody". They felt degraded just because they were poor.

"See like one time somebody told me I was an alcoholic, okay, and at one time in my life I was nothing. I didn't think I was anything... So I went to AA. I was something, I went there... So that was a hope for me. I was willing to be an alcoholic! Even to be an alcoholic! Because it was a place where alcoholics could be. I was accepted there. So, that's it, poor people where are they accepted? ...Not too many places, you see... It's whatever people label us. And then we swallow that."

Many disclosed feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence and self respect.

"Most people look at people in poverty as derelicts, drunks, what have you and that's not true! The 'stigmatisation' of being on the system has literally taken our self respect and flushed it down the toilet."

The members voiced feelings of guilt and depression which they saw as part of the same problem. Several members mentioned serious mental health problems, mainly depression before joining MOMC.

"I was feeling, before I joined MOMC, I was feeling very down because in a way, I felt guilty about being on welfare... I think a lot of it (defensiveness) resulted from ... depression. People, because they were depressed, they would take any comment as a comment directed to them ...I think it all derives from the feeling of guilt."

Even people who are involved in community agencies and politicians recognize and acknowledge that these are the feelings imposed on those who receive social assistance.

"I think one of the most important things is that welfare and family benefits and our society in general, tends to make people guilty and shame-based by receiving family benefits."

This then, is what the members of MOMC have experienced in their lives as they become involved in the group. They believe that they have been made to feel guilty, hopeless, powerless and stigmatized. They have little or no self-esteem and little self-respect.

Having gained some insight into the feelings of those who live in poverty, the next step is to understand what happens to the members on an individual level when they join MOMC.

*What MOMC Does For the Members*

When the members of Mothers and Others Making Change were asked if they had changed since joining the group, their answers indicated that there had been overwhelming changes in the way they viewed themselves. All of the members indicated that there had been positive personal changes in them and in their lives since their involvement with the group. At a meeting at which feedback was being given, the group was asked for a way to describe what happens to them at MOMC. The description that they developed was that there is an "increase in self power" and a feeling of togetherness when one starts to attend the group.

If one looks at the experience of poverty above - at the fear, the hopelessness, the stigmatization, the lack of self respect and the depression and guilt - then it can be seen that what those who live in poverty need is some self-esteem, some feelings of control over their lives, some hope and a sense of belonging. The members describe this as what they have at MOMC.

During the interviews, several members reported a change in their level of self-esteem through an increased awareness of themselves as accepted and valuable members of society.

"It's opened my eyes. It's also opened my heart. It's given me a reason to trust again and that's an important one... my faith in myself was rather low and I was getting to a point where I didn't believe in me any more. The system had beaten me down to a point where I didn't believe in me any more... where I didn't exist. I came to MOMC and I found that 'Hey!' people were willing to accept me for me! Willing to accept the ideas I had as valid and fruitful... it has really helped me to exercise my rights as a human being, to gain my self respect, to give me a sense of who and what I am."

One member believes that the increase in her self-esteem came about because she was no longer "ignorant".

"I do have more self-esteem than I used to have because even when I first started... MOMC, I was still really bad on the self-esteem part... because I know more. Now that I'm not so ignorant, that gives you some self-

esteem. It's ignorance that tears your self-esteem down. That's in everything."

Some members, in particular those who were most involved in the organizational aspects of the group, expressed that they had learned about their own abilities and in this way, their self-esteem had been raised.

"It has raised my self-esteem quite a lot... I did not know before I joined MOMC that I had the skills that I know now that I have... I'm good at organizing and I did not know prior to MOMC that I could do it. I learned to type... Overall, it's made me believe in myself that I can do whatever I put my mind into. And that it is O.K. to wait until I can do it."

Learning assertiveness skills was also a theme that emerged. Almost all of those who were interviewed stated that they were able to stand up for themselves - and thus feel more in control of what was happening to them.

"From the group I learned not to be shy any more ... I used to be a push over ... they (Social Service personnel) would say 'jump', I would say 'how high' while I was jumping. And what they said I figured that was true, that's the way it went."

Interestingly, three of the members interviewed stated that their mental health was much improved, that they were better able to cope with their own life situations.

"I was even contemplating ending it all. And now MOMC turned me around. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. I wouldn't be as well off as I am, if it wasn't for them ... They gave me confidence in myself. They made me like myself, which ... I'm thankful for!"

"I think I'm more capable of handling problems than I used to be, even in my personal life. I'm handling my own personal crises a lot better ... Since MOMC, I can go into a personal crisis and use my head instead of letting my own personal feelings overrun me like they used to. I used to faint dead away... I don't do that now. I use my head and say: 'Now, you keep it together because if you fall apart, you're not going to get any results from anything'... I don't think I'm near as bad an emotional cripple as I used to be."

"If it hadn't been for MOMC a few times, I would have wound up in a psychiatric ward because I got so frustrated with my circumstances that I found there was just no way out. There was nobody."

*The Process of Change For the Members of MOMC*

In reviewing the data regarding the process of change for the members of Mothers and Others Making Change, several themes began to emerge. The members all feel that there is support available to them; they feel accepted by their peers; they share stories, information and experiences; they compare themselves positively with others; and they believe that there is an increase in the amount of information that they are able to access. In this process they are able to view their situations from a different perspective and to share solutions to problems.

One member of Mothers and Others Making Change described the process which he has experienced and observed during his three year involvement with the organization. He views it as a difficult process whereby those who belong to MOMC take some control and responsibility for their own lives with the support of those who are in the same situation.

"They are slowly getting past the 'I can't's' to 'maybe I can'. And then it's from 'maybe I can' to 'yeah, I can do that' to 'I'm going to do that'. It's a slow progression and I'm telling you, you hold your heart in your mouth every step of the way! Until you get to a point where you say: 'Hey, let them try and trompe on me'... You take back control of your life... what I am saying is that just because you are on government assistance doesn't mean that you don't have the right to complain about something that hurts you. Or something that hurts your family. To take back the responsibility for what's happening to you instead of saying: 'Well, I can't do anything about it. It's the government and I can't do anything about it'. It feels so good to have that control, to be able to voice that control with knowing that you have support of others, you have the support of people that have gone through this, have come out of it ahead... To open people's eyes, to make them realize that there is no power on earth save your higher power who has complete control. And that's where it is."

*Support.* Support, both tangible and intangible, for and from others, was a major theme that emerged from the data. The participants described support that was tangible: the food and clothing that was available if needed, transportation to the meeting or to the doctor or the hospital and babysitting for the children during the meeting. The fact that this support was freely given, that the "request for help isn't



going to be held against you or used against you in any way" was a fact that several of the members emphasized. "We supply people with clothing and food and support which other groups do as well, but we do it freely, without questions."

Some of the tangible support takes the form of advocacy as well. If a member is in a situation where he/she feels that he/she needs another person with him/her for whatever reason, another member is available for that purpose.

"MOMC will take somebody and go with them to represent them in the court which is a big help because that's a very scary one for anybody especially if there are children involved."

"She (a member) went with me when I went to see the Justice of the Peace and the police. I didn't go alone, that's another thing I learned from MOMC, when you are poor you are discriminated against and you always take a witness with you so that you know what they said."

Just as importantly though, the members expressed the intangible support that was available to them through their participation in MOMC. They particularly accentuated the fact that no matter what the time or the situation, there was always someone there to "catch you before you fall". And that someone, the members emphasized, understands what you are going through because he/she has also felt the pain of his/her own similar situation.

"Sometimes all it takes is a phone call for somebody to say: 'I understand, you know, I just understand'. Sometimes that's just enough. You can get that from a phone call and you can get invited to where she is and they'll help you, she'll help you, others will help you through this organization."

"They're there to talk when I needed a friend to talk to. I could phone them up at any hour and they were willing to talk... They were willing to talk. It was just like they were my counsellors, it was better than having a psychiatrist to talk to. Because they knew me and they knew what I was going through and they understood it better... And it's nice to know that I can talk to someone who actually felt the pain that I felt. And they know what I'm going through, they are not just saying it. I won't want another psychiatrist or counsellor. The group is the best counselling I have had."

More than just feeling supported, part of the process of change for the members of MOMC is the opportunity to help and support others in addition to being helped

themselves. Every member interviewed mentioned this aspect of the group. They all stated the belief that if they could make somebody else's life a little easier by sharing what they know or what they have, then they could feel good about their participation.

"...helping with others, I used to have people phoning me sometimes two or three o'clock in the morning, wanting to talk about their problems and I never turned them away. This was my way of giving a little back for what I got."

"When you first go to the group, people say: 'we'll help you out' and you go to the group in order for them to help you. But the way it's happened is that I go to the group sort of like is to help it out now. Like, instead of it helping me out, you maybe get helped for a little bit, the first little bit. You go there in order for them, to help you but if you really are into this group, then you will end up doing something for the group. Going there not for yourself but for the group. That's changed."

*Acceptance and equality.* The members believe that they are really listened to and can be heard at MOMC - both because they are all in similar situations and therefore understood, and because they are accepted as equal and valuable members of the organization. "And if I want to talk I can be heard too. Like, you know, there is always somebody to listen. My opinion is as important as is anybody's."

The emphasis on acceptance and equality is a major component of MOMC of which the members are aware.

"Everybody is the same, right. I don't have to think about what I'm going to say or if I look alright or if my make-up is on right, or if I gained 20 pounds. I don't have to worry about stuff like that. I don't have to worry about how I talk, you know. I can just go there and not talk at all, just sit... I think the non-importance of who you are, or what you do, or what you have is very important... So everybody is the same. Nobody is better and everyone is equal, and that's what is stressed there, an awful lot too."

Even one of the community members that was interviewed described the feelings of fun and acceptance that she experiences when she attends a meeting of MOMC.

"It's given me lots of fun! ... You know in this kind of work, you can begin to take yourself too seriously. I think it's really important to have fun... their spontaneity and their basic down to earth way of relating and they just accept me as I am... and you're not playing games you know. It's more stressful being in structured environments where people cautiously weigh every word that they say before they say it and only say half of what they mean and all of that. It gets right out on the table at MOMC."

*Fun and celebration.* Fun is another part of what MOMC is about. For some of the members, Tuesday morning meetings are the only times that they are able to sit down with their peers and simply enjoy themselves in an atmosphere of acceptance and equality.

"I make it fun! I am fun! You have people to sit with and have fun... you go there, you have a social time. You sit there and you drink coffee and you smoke cigarettes and you talk amongst each other. You share these opinions, stories, you know, you learn things about being on assistance and that and you look forward to new activities that we're going to do, like new marches, new issues we're going to protest and stuff. That's fun."

Celebrations are another component of the fun and acceptance of MOMC. The annual Christmas party is seen as a further means of support for the membership and as another means for the group members to enjoy themselves and share a tradition.

"Christmas time was a real 'beaut'. Carole put on a big Christmas dinner, at MOMC, at the new centre. She worked her buns off preparing food, she had help, preparing hampers, doing whatever she could to make people's Christmas an enjoyable one. She wanted to make sure that the kids had something. Because being on the system, you get your cheque the first of December, you haven't had the opportunity to save any money... Christmas can be the most depressing and frustrating part of your year especially for your kids. Because they see all their friends getting these wonderful toys... And they are hurting because they can't provide the same things for their kids. So Carole tries to make that time of the year a special time where just because a kid is living in a poverty home, doesn't mean they have to lose out."

*Social comparison.* There is also an element of comparison in what happens to people when they attend MOMC. Some members mentioned that at the beginning, they believed that they were the one who needed help, but as more stories were shared they saw that they were perhaps not as "bad off" as the next person and that perhaps they could help that other person as well.

"Whereas I used to think that I was in a situation that I needed to be helped out, where I thought that I was the worst off. I mean, we have hard times, right but it doesn't bother me any more... I know that there are people worse off and that makes me want to help them... That's how it works, right, they do something for you and you do something for them. But that's the way it works in life. Same thing goes, right?"

The participants also seemed to be able to view their peers in the group as role models. They watched the behaviour and coping skills of others and saw that they could "do it" - could cope with their own situation.

"Knowing that other people are suffering the same thing I am and if they can make it through, so can I... mine's nothing compared to them... And I was thinking about ending it and making it over with, so it couldn't get any worse. And then I'm listening to people that are worse off than me and they're smiling... Then I learned that you can smile at the bad part."

Another aspect of comparing themselves to others involved viewing other people in the same situation as having positive qualities. The members themselves, it would seem, had believed what society had told them about people on social assistance - that they were undeserving "welfare bums". However, when they were able to see others with qualities they admired, they were better able to assess themselves.

"Even, like I could relate my case to others and see well, O.K., I'm not a welfare bum. There are a lot of other people here that are on social assistance, they are very intelligent so they want to go out and do something, something is preventing them from doing it. So, I'm not alone. That made me change the whole outlook on the assistance thing... I'm saying that I was not to blame."

The members also watched each other and gained strength in knowing that there were no reprisals for speaking out about their life situation. "Seeing other people can do it and seeing other people believe what they're doing, too. It sort of gives you the strength to do the same you know."

"Because up until now, we have been like scared little mice. We don't want to rock the boat, we don't want to cause waves, we don't want to do this, we don't want to do that. And there are a few people that had the guts to start causing waves and causing a little bit of friction and we watched, we watched really carefully from the close corners and we found out: 'hey, the sky didn't fall in. They didn't lose everything they had!' ...So, a lot more of us came out in our own way... Instead of whining about it, let's do something about it. And this is where the changes have happened, and those are major changes... It has been a very, very slow and very,very painful process, because you tend to be scared of letting go of something that is safe and going to something that is unknown."

*Sharing.* The sharing that happens at Mothers and Others Making Change is also a large component of the process of growth which the members undergo. The participants all talked about sharing of some kind.

The group members share stories in three ways. The first way is on a one to one basis. The group leaders know almost everyone's story, these confidences are shared anonymously with the group. Another way is that the members themselves tell their stories. The third way is when the member is ready and able to tell his/her story to the public. (For example, one member, with the support of other group members, was able, at a demonstration against the repeal of the rape shield law, to tell the crowd and a reporter that she had been sexually molested as a child - the first time in 45 years that she had been able to do so.)

"People tell us their stories when they are ready to. It is a confidence that (we) cherish. I feel that people when they tell me things, it's something that I have to keep confidential. I respect that, that they trust me enough to be able to tell me their stories... She (Carole) shares some of the stories by giving examples, by saying 'A member has had this happen'. She doesn't identify you by name so you remain anonymous. So she carries all that trust that you have given her as well. So that is one way stories are shared... People can see that their story is being shared with others but they don't have to get up and say: 'This is my story'... That is a way to get information out to the group without making people embarrassed... The (next) form of (sharing) is when the people themselves do have the guts, the strength, the courage, whatever to stand up and tell everybody what is going on. And finally when they get up and tell strangers ...there are a lot of ways in which stories happen and in which stories get out and people are able to see ...I guess it's different when you tell the story and you feel oppressed by telling the story and when somebody else tells the story and says: 'See how the system oppresses you', it gives you a different light to do your own struggling ... Put the onus on the real perpetrator of the crime."

This person emphasized that this process of sharing stories helps to remove much of the guilt felt by those on social assistance. It assists the members to see that perhaps it is not their fault that they are in the circumstances in which they find themselves. It is a healing process as well as an educational one.

"By sharing the stories, it's a healing process. It gets rid of some of that guilt that we have carried around for centuries. And it tells us that we should place the blame where it belongs, that's an education process, but it's also healing because it's coming from other people that have come through similar experiences."

The sharing of stories also leads to helping others solve problems. Many of the members found that their solutions could be shared and others found that they received solutions from others - again in similar circumstances.

"And through sharing of our common experience, we can find out different ways to deal with the same problem. Because sometimes when you are in a problematic situation, you can't see the forest for the trees. Where somebody else who has been through it and been involved can literally turn around and say: 'I've lived that. Here's what I did, maybe it will help you'. And it's a sharing and it's fantastic because then you don't feel alone. The aloneness, the separation is gone and that's a big thing to anybody living on limited income."

The sharing also takes the form of opinion sharing. As solutions and ideas are shared, the members feel heard and learn that their opinions are valid and valuable.

"We need a chance to say our opinion too, eh. And I tell you what it is, we get a chance through MOMC to say. We can go to Carole and she can say it for us. She can help us and she's got that confidence. She, she just can do it. It gives us, it gives me, hope."

There are then, several processes at work that assist the members in feeling supported, accepted and valuable. The support - both tangible and intangible - is felt keenly by the members and is a basis for their belief in themselves. The atmosphere of acceptance and equality helps the members to believe that they are valuable people and that there is a place where they belong. The enjoyment, through sharing time and activities together and through celebration, gives the members a further sense of belonging to a group of other people. By comparing themselves to others and by having positive role models available to them, the members are able once again to see that they are valuable people and that there is hope for their own future. Through sharing of stories, members are able to share their experiences, a healing process. By listening to the stories of others, there is an educational process happening whereby the fault for their situation can be transferred outside of themselves. Sharing also assists in problem-solving and gives the members alternative solutions to their seemingly insurmountable problems. There is hope.

This process, as described above, leads to the beginnings of feelings of self worth and hope and a sense of belonging. However, there is a further process at work as well, the members become educated about the resources that are available to them and about their rights.

*Information about rights and resources.* The other major theme that emerged from reviewing the data about the process of change for the members is the effect of increasing their knowledge both about themselves and about their situation. This theme was particularly predominant in reviewing the minutes of the meetings. Guest speakers

on topics that vary from nutrition to politics to self defense are frequent at meetings of Mothers and Others Making Change. Almost every meeting has information of some sort shared with the members of the group either through discussion of the views of a guest speaker or a newspaper article or through discussion of a member's particular situation.

This information sharing can be categorized as two different types of information. There are those categories of information that are designed to increase the awareness of the members about resources available to them, and those that serve to increase their knowledge about their rights.

The information about resources that the members receive is often shared by members who have already accessed a particular service in the community or the information is brought to the group directly by a representative of a particular organization. The members trust that the information that they receive is accurate and honest.

"It (MOMC) has built an access unit in a community where people trust where there was no trust before... They trust the information they are getting is correct, it's valid, and its not second hand. It's coming directly from the community services or wherever it needs to be... I mean half the things they (social service personnel) told me wasn't even the way it was... I mean I didn't know anything. I've never been here before... I just took their word for granted, they knew what they were talking about, it was their job. I found out, boy, they didn't know what they were talking about and I've learned to weed between the lines. Weed all these words out that are useless."

The members believe that it is important to have information about what affects their lives - that it helps them be more prepared for what may happen to them.

"The information part is very important because there is always something being brought up that I need to know about. So, it's like listening to the six o'clock news!... You have to learn what is going on around you some way or the other. If you don't, you're in trouble... And I have to or at least I feel that I should know as much about it because they are going to affect my life. So, the more I know, the more prepared I can be."



Some also expressed the opinion that having knowledge increased their self-esteem.

"Now that I'm not so ignorant, that gives you some self-esteem. It's ignorance that tears your self-esteem down. That's in everything."

The member expressed the opinion that knowing more about their rights enabled them to have more control over what was happening to them.

"As long as the field workers could keep us green, they could say or do whatever they wanted to us. They were in control and they had power! But once you let them know: 'I know what you're all about and I pay you your wages', they're not so haughty then, they come down a step or two. I'm not saying it gives us a whole lot of power. It gives us more control over our own lives. And even if it's only a little bit, a little bit gets to be bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. You can go out there and you can function without feeling like a dupe, like a chump, scared to speak up for yourself because everybody makes themselves think that they're smarter than you are."

The information about resources that the members receive helps them to discern that they have choices in their lives and that there is hope for them "for a better future". The knowledge about their rights that they acquire enables them to be more assertive and helps to increase their self-esteem.

*Collective action.* There is one further component of participation in Mothers and Others Making Change that seems to affect the participants at an individual level. By participating in a collective action (rallies, demonstrations, marches, and protests), the members begin to feel good about their participation, about being able to take action on something that affects their lives.

"I used to have to coax them 'Now, come on, we've got to go on these, we've got to do this' and they would be convinced and they would do it and they would always feel good about it! The people feel good about that, I don't know why, it makes them feel that they've made a stand, that they've been responsible for something that they didn't like. Remember what I said, learning about something and then saying no way! ... and acting on it."

When a member initially participates in a demonstration, he/she often feels scared and uncertain about his/her participation. "It was scary. I didn't know what to do. I just marched along with everybody else, I just followed, I didn't know what I was doing."

As the feelings of fear dissipate, they are replaced by a sense of awe at the power that emerges.

"I guess I caught the bug. That's the way I explain it. Once you've been on a protest and have been out there demanding your rights and demanding, because you do demand ... Once you make a statement like that, you've got the bug. You know what it's like to stand up for your rights and from that point on, you can never look back."

There is also a sense of belonging, of being with others who share the same anger and frustration.

"I got to see people publicly express their anger... I got to see that it was alright to do it in an organized manner like that.. I felt that there was a statement to be made and I was out there with other people who felt as I did."

"I felt part of the crowd... It's almost like - I've never participated in a riot but I can understand how you could get involved... It's almost like the whole atmosphere gets you... the adrenalin just flows and you can't stop yourself."

The demonstrations also help the members to see that they are not alone in their fight, that they do have some power.

"But once you join together, once you show solidarity, once you show hey, it's not only me, it's my neighbour down the road, it's my sister, whoever. And especially politicians, they get scared with numbers, they get really scared with numbers. And sometimes you have to use that fear to improve... the marches, the pickets, the rallies, they are all useful. They raise people's awareness, they give you some fight inside yourself, and some belief in the fact that by joining together, you can do something."

For some of the members, there is also a powerful sense of emotion and of identifying with a particular issue.

"(One demonstration) brought back all the memories of the struggle when I was homeless and how difficult it was to get housing and everybody got up and told their stories. That was really emotional because I could feel the pain, it was something that I had been through myself. It was very difficult... it was the first time I ever got up to a microphone to talk, it was the first time I ever shared my pain with other people."

There are also those demonstrations in which the members participate that have no direct connection with their own lives. One member remembers a march in which she participated that left her feeling as though she had been very useful in helping others.

"When we're doing it, it's not just for us, it's for everybody ... Not everything that we picket or march, it doesn't have to be useful to me. Like, I think the best thing I did was walk for the Indians. That was the most, that was the one that made me feel the best. 'Cause it had nothing to do with me and it was totally unselfish, you know what I mean? It was nothing to do for me but it was for other people... it was something that I could, all I had to do was walk a certain distance and that was going to help out people. That was pretty easy to do!"

Even one community member tacitly acknowledged during an interview that the experience of being involved in a demonstration "helps people feel good about themselves".

The members' participation in rallies, marches, pickets and demonstrations adds a further dimension to their participation in MOMC. It enables the members to express anger and frustration in a positive way with others who are in a similar situation. Demonstrations are also a source of the healing that can occur through the sharing of pain with others. The experience of demonstrating helps members feel good about themselves for doing something for others.

*Shared beliefs and values.* In reviewing the data at the individual level, it became evident that the members of Mothers and Others Making Change share some beliefs about what membership in MOMC entails.

"We're all there for the same reason and we all believe in the same things about the group."

"We help out people that don't belong to our group and we believe in that."

"We care because we're in the group and that's what we're here for."

On the wall at MOMC's centre is a poster that was made by a member that states:

"It is not your fault that you are poor." This credo appeared strongly in the statements made by the members about their beliefs about poverty.

"That was one of our first discussions we had as a group was what poverty was. What we thought the meaning of poverty was and I told them, I came right out and said: 'Hey, I brought it on myself. I must have done something wrong somewhere along the line. Mismanaged my funds, my priorities were wrong. I brought this all on my own, on myself. It's my fault I am poor and in poverty'. And that's when (another member) explained to me no it's not. It's the system's fault."

"I think differently because now I know what the main cause (of poverty) is. It's a societal problem, it's not me. It's not something that I caused personally. It wasn't my fault and I'm doing what I can to rectify it."

The belief that they are not to blame for their plight serves to create anger within the group. This anger can in turn be used to promote action and responsibility.

"My own ignorance was a blessing, it kept me from hurting because I'll tell you once I learned and now that I know, it just makes me all the madder! You walk around angry all the time! When you're ignorant, you don't know, you think it's your fault and it's easier to think that it's your fault than it is to realize that the outside influence has got a lot to do with it! Because once you do know, you have to take responsibility because ignorance is a blessing only that it keeps you that you don't go crazy in your mind, but once you find out that's what gives you that urge to fight back!... That's what happens when you come out of the darkness!... That's what happens at MOMC. Once we start... once people would find out why they were poor, it would piss them off because all their lives they've been blaming themselves and all of a sudden they find out that it's something else! It pisses them off, that's what education does to you. So once you've got an education, you better be willing to do something about it... That's why them churches and everybody don't want to hear from the poor, because then they have to deal with their consciences... They've got to be held responsible for their actions."

There is a belief for the members of MOMC that there is something that they can do. This belief seemed to take two forms. The members expressed the belief that there

is power in joining together with others in the same situation, that there is power in numbers.

"And MOMC wants the public to know that burying the problem is not helping the problem because it festers. And I learned that poor people have power, lots of power I learned that through MOMC...And if all the poor people banded together across this country, the government wouldn't have a chance, there is just too many of them. I mean, what is it, 750,000 kids in this province alone are being raised in poverty... most of our members have felt that 'how can one person change the system?'. Maybe one person can't but as a voice, as a group, we can."

There was also a sense that the members believed in themselves as being powerful as well as being able to make a difference. "The most important part is the believing that you can make a change through your participation."

"I support the NDP party, I am a member of the NDP party by the way... That was through MOMC. I learned that people like me, even though we are not members of parliament can still be members of a party... And it's just since MOMC that I learned all this stuff, that I can make a difference. That's what they taught me. I can make a difference even if my party doesn't get voted in I can still make a difference."

The members also voiced the expectation for others to become involved in the process of "speaking out". They believe that there is a responsibility to talk with others about issues.

"You ask them: 'What have you done to change that?'

'I can't do anything alone. You can't.'

'But there's a lot more people out there.'

'Oh, I don't know if there is or not.'

'Then start, go out and demonstrate and see how many people join you.'

But if they all think like you, nothing will be done."

The members of MOMC then, believe that they are not to blame for their own situations; they believe that they can be heard by joining together with others; they believe that through their participation they can make a difference; and they believe that it is their responsibility to speak out about the issues that affect their lives.

15000 COUNTY ROAD 5 DUFINSVILLE MN 55337 USA  
TEL: 612 435 7667 FAX: 612 435 7687 TLX: 510600948

### *Community Involvement of Members*

The members of MOMC gain much personally from their participation in the organization. There is a wealth of potential for the energy that results from the process of gaining self-esteem, self awareness, acceptance and knowledge. The members were asked if they had become involved in any other organizations since joining MOMC. All of the members could identify other community organizations with which they had become affiliated. Some were able to make use of services of other agencies more readily, but others were using their energy to make contributions to those organizations.

Some of the organizations with which the members mentioned being involved include:

- The Working Centre
- Community Nutrition Working Project
- Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre
- Cooperative housing
- counselling
- Family and Children's Services
- Sexual Assault Centre
- volunteering at hospital
- Tenant's Associations
- John Howard Society
- Best Starts Project
- Sand Hills Community Development Inc.
- December 6th Committee

The energy available to the membership has also been given back to MOMC. Although most members stated that they had done "next to nothing compared to what they've done for me", most were able to say that they help out by being there to support others, by participating in marches, by making pickets and by bringing in new members. The process that enables members of MOMC to gain some control over their own lives, also creates energy that the members can then give back to the organization or use within the group.

**Summary: Individual Level**

MOMC is a grassroots, non-profit organization which engages in social action as a political means to improve the lives of people living below the poverty line and as a means to raise community and political awareness about issues that affect the poor. Through self-help/mutual aid and advocacy activities, the members are offered support and gain knowledge and confidence in their ability to attain some control over their own lives.

The history indicates that the group has been in existence for approximately seven years. At one point, there was a change in the group from one that was professionally led to one that had little or no input from professionals. The group it would seem has been fairly consistent in working together over the years and has produced some lasting effects in the community in terms of leadership and input into the system.

Before joining MOMC, the members described themselves as having little or no self-esteem and little self-respect. They believe that they felt guilty, hopeless, powerless and stigmatized because they are on social assistance.

The members reported that they have changed since their involvement with the group. They describe increased self-esteem, increased assertiveness, improved coping abilities, hopefulness, a sense of belonging and a belief that they are being supported.

When asked about how these changes occurred, the members describe the process of the change in themselves. They all believe that there is support available to them - both tangible and intangible support. They also reported feeling good about being able to help others in a similar situation.

The participants feel accepted by and equal to their peers and thus believe that they are valuable. They enjoy themselves and celebrate together. The members compare



themselves positively to others and recognize that there is hope for them and that, again, they are valuable people.

Through the telling of stories, members are able to share their experiences - a healing process. By listening to the stories of others, there is an educational process happening whereby the fault for their situation can be transferred outside of themselves. Sharing also assists in problem-solving and gives the members alternative solutions to their seemingly insurmountable problems. There is hope.

There is also much information sharing at MOMC. This information sharing can be categorized as two different types of information. There are those categories of information that are designed to increase the awareness of the members about resources available to them, and those that serve to increase their knowledge about their rights. The members have more knowledge about both their rights and the resources available to them. There is an increase in self-esteem from this knowledge as well as an increase in assertiveness. The members begin to feel hopeful about gaining some control over their own lives.

The member's participation in rallies, marches, pickets and demonstrations adds a further dimension to their participation in MOMC. It enables the members to express anger and frustration in a positive way with others who are in a similar situation. Demonstrations are also a source of the healing that can occur through the sharing of pain with others. The experience of demonstrating also serves to help members feel good about themselves for doing something for others.

The members of MOMC also share some common beliefs. They believe that they are not to blame for their own situations; they believe that they can be heard by joining together with others; they believe that through their participation they can make a difference; and they believe that it is their responsibility to speak out about the issues that affect their lives.

The process that enables members of MOMC to gain some control over their own lives, also creates energy that the members can then give back to the organization or use within the community. This is evidenced by the increased participation of the members in other community organizations.

In examining the members' perspective of the changes that have occurred in them since their involvement in MOMC, one can see a process that happens. The members who become involved in MOMC are often feeling hopeless, powerless, discriminated against and guilty when they join the organization. Through the process of being supported and accepted, of enjoying themselves, of comparing themselves to others, of sharing their stories and experiences, of participating in demonstrations and marches and sharing beliefs and values, the members begin to feel self-esteem, self-respect, personal value, and hopefulness. This creates energy in the individuals which is then used within MOMC or within the community. The people begin to believe that they are valuable members of society.

Following is a table (Table 2) which summarizes this empowerment process.

**Table 2 - THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT**

<u>EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY</u>	
-scared	-unaccepted
-alone	-guilty
-fearful	-depressed
-stigmatized	-rejected
-apologetic	-insecure
-no self-respect	-hopeless
-no self-confidence	

<u>WHAT HAPPENS AT MOMC - PROCESS</u>
-has available role model
-appraises self favourably
-gains information about rights and resources
-opportunity to help others
-is listened to by peers
-feels accepted and equal
-gains social support (tangible and intangible)
-shares stories and experiences
-shares problems and solutions
-has fun and celebrates
-acts collectively to have opinions heard

<u>WHAT HAPPENS TO MEMBERS</u>
-believe in self as valuable person
-hopeful about the future
-gains self-esteem
-gains energy
-contributes to organization and/or community
-blames external causes for problems
-sees self as having control over and responsibility for own life

<u>PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT</u>
-individual identifies own strengths and competencies
-he/she uses those strengths within the group
-individual takes action through political action, assertiveness, and/or collaboration with other organizations to create changes in his/her life

## **DISCUSSION: THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MOMC**

As outlined in the conceptual framework, there are two foci for discussing the results of this research. One focus is that this investigation is designed to be used as a means of giving feedback to the members of the organization with regards to the evaluation question "are we making change?". The other focus is on the relationship between theory and the reality of what happens at MOMC - as a means of building on present theory. This discussion section then will focus first on the action research question and then on the current theory as it relates to the processes and outcomes at the individual level.

### **Discussion of Results As Action Research**

At the individual level, the goals of MOMC as outlined above, have been:

- to increase personal worth
- to increase individual power and assertiveness
- to increase knowledge about resources and rights

The group further indicated that these goals could be achieved through the process of:

- sharing resources
- sharing stories
- receiving moral support
- offering what they have
- finding companionship
- helping others
- having fun
- engaging in discussions

(Source: Mothers and Others Making Change: Purposes, Goals and Objectives, 1988, and members of MOMC.)

The fact that the members of MOMC gain tremendously through the process of their involvement in the organization is unquestionable. The changes that the members described very much parallel the goals of the organization. They acquire self-esteem, self-respect and a belief in their own personal value. They gain a belief that they will

be able to move towards their own goals when they are ready to do so. They have increased their knowledge about resources. They have gained insight into their own rights and have acquired enough confidence to access those resources and to assert those rights. There is a process of individual empowerment that allows the members to believe that they have more control over their own lives.

The process which emerged from this research is similar to that described by the group. All of the processes mentioned by the group were confirmed by those who were interviewed and often through the minutes of the meetings as well. They share resources and stories and offer what they have to others. They believe that they are receiving moral support and help others in similar situations. They find companionship and have fun. There are also frequent discussions that occur in the group around issues that are important to the members.

One factor that was not mentioned by the group but was evident in the results was the positive identification with those "better off" and the comparison with those who they view as "worse off" than themselves. This enables the members to have positive role models available to them and also allows them to view their own situation from a different perspective. This is a naturally occurring phenomenon that was not labelled by the group but was identified by the research participants as a way in which they were able to view their own situation in a different way and to share solutions with others. The fact that many members are viewed as role models also enables the members to feel hope about their own situation.

The second factor not mentioned prior to the evaluation was that the members share some beliefs and values about their situation. This factor emerged as very significant to the members. Their sharing of beliefs gave them the strength to re-evaluate their situation with less self-blame and to move the responsibility for their own situation outside of themselves.

The third factor that influenced the members but was not mentioned prior to the investigation, was the effects of participation in social action activities. This allowed the members to believe that they were involved in a change process and that they were part of something larger - a movement that includes groups from other locations in Ontario. It also left the members feeling that they had an opportunity to "speak out" and be heard about issues that affect their lives.

The opportunity to help others was also a theme that strongly emerged and had not previously been identified by the membership. The participants believe that their ability to be helpful to others takes them beyond their own situation and allows them to be valuable to others. Even participation in social action activities facilitates this sense of contribution - they identified marching for a cause that had little to do with them personally and the positive feelings that emerged from that.

The results of this investigation were discussed with the members of MOMC at a series of weekly meetings. They were asked for their feedback about the ideas presented about their organization. The model that has emerged includes input from those feedback sessions. It was the members who insisted that the experience of participating in social action precipitated a feeling of togetherness within the group. They also stressed the importance of being "really" listened to and "heard". The members gave strong endorsement to the results presented to them. They agree wholeheartedly with the power that MOMC has in their lives.

One issue that arose at this level was the fact that some of the newer members of the organization were not aware of the history of MOMC. Although the discussion prompted by the feedback sessions facilitated some sharing of that history, the group decided that they will try to show the members some of the videotapes made of the picnic and of the marches at a future meeting. In addition, the group has decided that they would like to share their strengths with other organizations and members of the

community. They are talking about producing a video and/or a book in order to share their experiences. An attempt has also been made by a member to contact the local newspaper in order to publish an article about the benefits to members of MOMC. This avenue of public education will be pursued by the group members. There is also a process started that will enable the publication of a newsletter, which will include the history and strengths of MOMC.

In summary, then, the original questions posed for the individual level of this research project included: "*Has Mothers and Others Making Change been an empowering organization?*" and "*What was it about participation in MOMC that enabled the members to believe in their own individual power?*"

The answer to the first question is "Yes!", Mothers and Others Making Change is an empowering organization. Members come to believe that they have some control over their own lives.

The factors that enable this process of empowerment to occur include:

- The availability of positive role models
- Favourable appraisal of own situation
- Gaining information about rights and resources
- Experiencing an opportunity to help others
- Feeling accepted and equal
- Gaining support - both tangible and intangible
- Sharing experiences, stories, problems, solutions and fun
- Being listened to by peers
- Participating in social action activities

All of these elements facilitate a process of empowerment.

### **Discussion of Results As They Relate To Current Theory**

As was discussed in the review of the literature, there is an obligation on the part of researchers to share the knowledge and insight that they have gained when doing action research in a theoretical way as well as a means of applied action research

(Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). In this way research serves both to develop useful theories of the "*miracle of organizing*" (p. 162) and to be useful to those involved in either present or future activities of the organization. The results of this study were given to the members of MOMC and they have made decisions about how they would like to use that information. Now it is time to evaluate and further develop the theoretical aspects of the investigation. The results of this research as they relate to current empowerment theory will be discussed first. Then other theories of self-help and social action will be related to the outcome of this project.

### *Empowerment Theory*

In the review of the literature, theories of empowerment were discussed. The review included a current definition of empowerment as:

"Psychological empowerment may be generally described as the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in, the public domain.... (as) a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to matters of social policy and social change" (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, pp. 724-726).

This definition reflects what has happened to those who are members of MOMC. They have gained a sense of their own strengths and competencies; they believe they are more able to influence people and organizations that affect their lives; and they are willing and able to take action to change the circumstances in which they find themselves. Their definitions include a sense that they are better able to take control of their own lives. This was a theme that was repeated many times by the participants. They also described situations in which they were able to stand up for themselves, to be heard, whereas before they may have passively accepted what was happening to them.



The one fact that is indisputable is the action component of this definition of empowerment. The vehemence with which the members talked about the need to take action once they were aware of the sources of the oppression under which they have struggled was emphatic. To repeat one particular quote seems important.

"Because once you do know (you are not to blame), you have to take responsibility... once you find out that's what gives you that urge to fight back!... That's what happens when you come out of the darkness!... That's what happens at MOMC... once people would find out why they were poor, it would piss them off because all their lives they've been blaming themselves and all of a sudden they find out that it's something else!... once you've got an education, you better be willing to do something about it."

This is one aspect of empowerment theory that has not been given enough importance. *Acting upon* new-found strength and competence and new knowledge is a significant component for the definition of empowerment.

The definition compiled above then agrees with the definition which has emerged from this research. The components of the definition need to include the belief in one's own strengths and competencies, the willingness to use those attributes in a public way to create change *and* to take action on new-found beliefs in order to gain control over one's own life. Actions in both the private and public domains are needed. These are all important components of a definition of empowerment.

#### *Factors Involved in Empowerment*

Many researchers have identified components of the process of empowerment that are important to the understanding of how people begin to feel that they can take control over their own lives. These components were identified in the review of the literature above where it was also emphasized that little research has been done with regards to the empowering effects of self-help groups. The potential for mutual aid groups to be empowering certainly has been recognized (Rappaport, 1986). The

components that have been identified with regard to self-help groups include: the "helper-therapy principle", learning common aspects of a problem, social support and encouragement, viewing a situation as similar, acceptance, a shared understanding and a sense of community (Fischer, 1984; Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Gottlieb, 1983; Heller et al., 1984; Hurley, 1988; Riger, 1984; Roberts et al., 1991). These components were also found to be part of the process of empowerment for the members of Mothers and Others Making Change. However, there were also some other interesting factors that emerged from the research. Here, the factors that emerged from the inquiry and those that did not appear will be discussed. Then a model of empowerment through the self-help process will be discussed.

*Social support.* The importance of social support has long been recognized as a means of mediating stress (Gottlieb, 1983). However, as a component of the process of empowerment in self-help groups, it has received only cursory attention.

The members of MOMC view this as a very important aspect of their involvement in the group. They believe that the support - both tangible (food, clothing, transportation) and intangible (just being there) - is important in allowing them to believe that they will be able to cope from one day to the next. Social support serves to mediate the every day stresses of those members of the group who live in poverty - a stressful situation. It also gives the members the sense that they are valuable people, worthy of freely given assistance and support.

*Helper-therapy principle.* The "helper-therapy" principle - people get helped by helping others - has often and consistently been reported as a major factor involved in the success of the self-help movement (Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Hurley, 1988; Roberts et al., 1991). This factor also emerged from this research. All of the participants in the research identified the benefit of helping others. The members felt very strongly about their ability to help others through their own experiences. Even participating in

a social action for another group with no common interests lead to a belief that the member was being useful. The ability to help others and therefore be useful, is a component of the process of empowerment for members of MOMC.

*Sense of community (acceptance/equality).* In community psychology theory, the need of people to experience a sense of community (Heller et al., 1984; Levine, 1988; Sarason, 1974) has been well documented. The elements identified that create a sense of community include: membership, influence, a sharing of values, and a shared emotional connection (Heller et al., 1984, pp. 136-137).

The members of MOMC feel a strong sense of membership in their organization. They share some common values and beliefs (see below) and they also share an emotional connection. They believe in their equality and feel the anger toward their oppressors. From the beginning of the group, attempts were made to offer the participants an atmosphere in which there was acceptance and equality. The members feel this very strongly within their organization. They believe that they belong to their organization and identify this as an important component in their own process of empowerment. They have a sense of community.

*Fun, enjoyment and celebration.* Although the current theory of empowerment and the role of self-help groups does emphasize the role of a sense of community to the members, one aspect that is not often mentioned is the importance of fun and celebration that is part of being a member of MOMC. Levine (1988) does refer to this factor as a "network of social relationships" (p.176). With friends and family often difficult to reach because of financial limitations, celebrating holidays such as Christmas and enjoying the company of others are important aspects of the process of building a sense of community or attachment to the group. Once again, the members believe that they are valued people when they can enjoy themselves and celebrate with others in similar situations.

*Availability of positive role models / favourable appraisal of one's own situation.*

The fact that the members compare themselves to one another in the ways mentioned above (as having more severe problems and as role models) has been mentioned only briefly in the literature. Roberts et al. (1991) mention the fact that members of self-help groups experience similarities with each other. This is an important aspect of the process for the members of MOMC. They favourably appraise their own situation and/or admire someone else who is like them and see that there is hope for their future when others can succeed in a way that they are hopeful about for themselves.

*Sharing experiences / problems / solutions / stories.* Again, the literature has not focused on the process of sharing that the participants of this research project identified in their interviews. Borkman (1991) cautions against emphasizing the "healing" process that occurs by the sharing of stories. However, the participants in this research stressed the healing effects of being able to tell their story. In some ways, this is a history of the person, a way to say: "This is where I came from". However, it is more than just a healing process. It helps to relieve the guilt and assists in redefining the individual in terms of self-blame. It is a therapeutic as well as an educational process.

Jourard (1971) discusses this process of self disclosure as a necessary prerequisite to consciousness-expansion. In order for questioning about the self and society to occur, some risk needs to be taken. This risk is more likely to occur if there is mutual disclosure and the person receiving the confidence is deemed as trustworthy.

"True consciousness-expansion (education) yields a transcultural perspective from which to view one's usual roles and the society within which one enacts them. The persons liberated by teacher... from unquestioned compliance with roles and unquestioned pursuit of social values may be seen by others as a rebel or a revolutionary. As he(she) reveals his(her) expanded consciousness to others, he(she) runs the risk of being seen as a threat to the status quo, whether in his(her) family or in society at large... Disclosure of one's experience is most likely when the other person is perceived as a trustworthy person of good will and/or who is willing to disclose his(her) experience to the same depth and breadth" (Jourard, 1971, pp. 65-67).

The trust and acceptance that has been identified as a central part of MOMC allows for this sharing and self disclosure to occur. According to Jourard (1971), this self disclosure is a prerequisite for consciousness expansion and education.

The sharing of stories is also a means of problem-solving. In the process, others can share their solutions to similar problems or offer to assist the individual with the problem because he/she has had a similar experience.

*Gaining of knowledge about resources / rights.* The review of the literature yielded very little information about this aspect of self-help groups. However, Fischer (1984) did point out that community participants with new information had increased self-esteem and became more politicized. Riger (1984) emphasized the access to resources as important in developing skills and self-esteem.

The participants in this research project felt very strongly about the information that is available to them through their attendance at meetings of MOMC and through their connection with other people. Learning about both their rights and available resources served to increase their self-esteem and to offer them choices. They believe that because of the information which they have acquired, they have more control over their own lives.

*Collective action.* There is some indication in the literature that there is a relationship between social action/community development and empowerment. Collective action helps people see that they are not "struggling in isolation" (Adamson et al., 1988, p.155) but are part of a larger social movement. It has been labelled as a potentially empowering experience (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Fischer, 1984; Kieffer, 1984; Riger, 1984).

The experiences of the participants of this research confirm this potential. Their actions left them feeling connected to a larger set of organizations, proud that they were able to speak out against injustices and connected with others through the sharing

of their experiences. The action component of empowerment theory is possible through collective action.

Gidron et al. (1991) state that the outcome of involvement in self-help groups is an increased sense of social and public activism (p.679). The research participants believe that the social activism is a result of acting on their new-found knowledge and sense of connection to others. For them, it is an empowering experience in and of itself.

*Shared beliefs and values.* The members of MOMC share some beliefs and values. They believe that they are not to blame for their own situations, that they can be heard by joining together with others, that through their participation they can make a difference, and that it is their responsibility to speak out about the issues that affect their lives.

Gottlieb (1983) and Prilleltensky (in press) have identified the power of attributing the cause of one's situation to external reasons in that it serves to make the participants "active agents of change" (Gottlieb, 1983, p. 284). "Those who attribute failure to personal, permanent and pervasive factors will likely not assume control when faced with the next setback" (Prilleltensky, in press, p. 18-19). This placing of blame elsewhere is a dominant theme in the interviews, in the meetings and in the philosophy of MOMC. Most of those who were interviewed had changed their view from one of self-blame to one of circumstantial blame during the process of their involvement with MOMC.

### *Process of Empowerment*

Lord and Farlow (1990) outlined a process of empowerment as incorporating a personal crisis or motivational trigger and as individuals learning they have a voice and that people will listen and understand. There is a change in either social or environmental context. Often a supportive, inspiring and therefore, significant person

serves as a bridge to peers. Involvement in community life was also cited as key to the growth of empowerment.

The process of involvement at MOMC can be seen to closely parallel that process described by Lord and Farlow (1990). Inherent in MOMC are the resources available to allow for empowerment to emerge. The members of MOMC come to the group usually because they need help, often with housing, legal issues, or because they are feeling powerless, hopeless and lack self-esteem. They are given the support that they need and the assistance that they require by their peers - without question and without obligation. They are given information about their rights and about the resources that are available to them. They share their stories and listen to the stories of others. They begin to realize that they are not alone, that they are not to blame and that they are accepted as exactly who they are at MOMC. They begin to feel a sense of community and a sense of their own strengths and competencies. They have a place to practice these new skills and strengths within the group - a safe and accepting place. They are able to help others who come to the group. They contribute to discussions, are heard, and begin to share the beliefs of others. They begin to take action toward taking control over their own lives either through collective action or through assertion of their rights. They begin to gain personal value and insight.

This process creates energy which is then transferred to the group or taken elsewhere in the community. There is hope. This complex and multi-level view of the process that occurs at MOMC is a beginning understanding of the process of empowerment for the members.

The contribution that this investigation makes to the theory of the process of empowerment in self-help groups has potential. Although it is recognized that the research is a case study because it relates to only one self-help organization, the depth of the investigation and the close relationship of the investigator to the participants

(one that is uncommon in research because of the difficulty of the maintenance of that relationship) warrants some consideration.

The major contributions of this research to empowerment theory are questions about the role played by favourable appraisal of their own situation and the availability of positive role models, sharing stories and the role of fun and enjoyment in the process. These issues require further research before they can be incorporated into any comprehensive theory of empowerment. A more comprehensive research project involving more organizations would yield more data regarding these questions.

There are also some questions about the technique of self-reporting and the retrospective view used in this investigation. Goldklang (1991) reports that there is a discrepancy between the reported level of change and the measurable level of change:

"...evaluations of naturally occurring self-help groups have produced discrepancies between what members report they have derived from the groups and data based on symptomatology, adjustment, or improvement. Levy (in press) has written that those discrepancies pose a potentially serious problem because the popularity and growth of the groups derive largely from their members' view of their value to them, while their legitimacy as interventions rests largely on the assessments of their effectiveness on researchers' criteria." (p. 792).

The results of this research report a significant level of change in the beliefs and attitudes of the participants of MOMC. Further research may be required to develop a means of measuring that change. Seligman (1990, cited in Prilleltensky, in press) has identified an "optimistic explanatory style" - when the causes of bad events are viewed by an individual as external, specific and temporary - as mediating the experience of helplessness (pp. 18-19). The identification of this style may serve to identify a change in the explanatory style of participants which may indicate the beginning of the empowerment process. However, as Prilleltensky (in press) emphasizes, those who are subject to recurring and/or acute life stresses need "real experiences of control to change real-life stressors" (p. 19). One could also argue the importance of the *belief* that



one is empowered as opposed to the *fact* that one is empowered. Both are important, although admittedly different criteria.

The other issue is in the retrospective reporting during the interviews. Roberts et al. (1991) suggest that the drawback of retrospective and subjective accounts of helping processes is that they cannot "substitute for the systematic observation of helping events as they occur" (p. 717). Further research employing techniques of systematic observation may produce less subjective results.

One more issue needs to be addressed at this point. Through observation of the group members during weekly meetings, it has been noted that not all of the members share a belief in their own empowerment. Some are not able as yet to take control of their own lives. Upon further consideration, it became obvious that the members who had been interviewed were long-standing members of the organization. Most had been involved since shortly after the picnic three years ago. Most are also members who have been fairly committed to the organization over that period of time although some were sporadic in attendance and committed only their time each week to the meetings. It is possible that the process described above takes time to occur. As Kieffer (1984) concluded: "experience is the core of empowerment learning" (p. 26). Only through doing, over an extended period of time, can one become empowered by participation in the community. It is also possible that the level of involvement may influence this process. Further research through interviews with members at various stages of involvement and with varying lengths of time for membership may provide valuable clues about the process of empowerment for the members.

In summary then, this investigation was to evaluate MOMC in two ways: as action research for the benefit of the group and as a means to expand on empowerment theory as it relates to self-help groups. The group has been given the impressions of the results of the inquiry and have chosen what they wish to do with that information.

They recognize the power of their organization at the individual level. They know that they are making change in the lives of the members.

This research served to confirm the current definition of empowerment as involving the recognition of strengths and competencies, the use of behaviours that confirm those strengths and taking action that will increase the control they feel over their own lives. MOMC provides a structure that allows this process to occur.

The results of this research indicate that the processes involved in empowerment through participation in a self-help group include: social support - both tangible and intangible, helping others, experiencing a sense of community and sharing fun and celebrations, the availability of positive role models, the favourable appraisal of one's own situation, sharing stories, experiences, problems and solutions, sharing beliefs and values, gaining knowledge of rights and resources, and participation in social action activities. These results add to the current theory of empowerment through self-help group participation by emphasizing the availability of positive role models and the favourable appraisal of one's own situation, of fun and celebration, and of the importance and strength of the process of education and healing through the sharing of stories.

## **RESULTS: MOMC WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER SOCIETY**

### **The Organization**

MOMC has been identified as a unique group in that there is a combination of self-help and social action embodied within the same organization. This is identified by the research participants as a real strength of MOMC.

"One of the most important anti-poverty organizations, not just in Southwestern Ontario, but in the province, country, is MOMC. Not only have they got some sort of a good ability to pull their people out but they've also ...developed a level of very practical sort of self-help within their organization that's better than anything I've seen anywhere in the province ... I think that they are an essential organization. They are certainly not political sophisticates and they don't masquerade as that but in terms of effectiveness and in terms of the spirit that they can generate ... we have some lessons to learn from them."

Some understanding of the structure and processes of the organization is important in appreciating the uniqueness of this organization.

#### ***Structure***

The structure of the organization is informal and there is no authority. People come to the meetings and talk as they wish. There are no formal rules to follow.

"(People come to MOMC) because we're informal. We're not structured at all. We have no formalities in MOMC. I mean really, it's run so haphazard! That's what makes people come. They like that. You know what people shy away from is authority. They don't want to come to another place where there is authority!"

#### ***Decision-Making***

Although there is a management committee consisting of members of the executive of MOMC and some interested community participants, this committee operates in an advisory capacity only. All decisions are made by the members of the

organization. The president of MOMC expresses the process for decision-making as follows:

"They (members) always made the decisions and I always just carried them out. That was all. It's all it's ever been and it's the way it still is. They make the decisions and I carry them out... If I don't carry them out, somebody else will."

### *Leadership*

In terms of leadership, three members have had the positions of president, vice-president, treasurer and recording secretary since the group's inception as Mothers and Others Making Change. Other leadership positions such as coordinator for the disabled and membership coordinator have been held by various people throughout the past three years. Members volunteer for these positions or are asked to fill them and are in those positions as long as they are willing or able to do so.

The secretary of the group has been there since the group began. Carole Silliker and Jennifer Myers have been the president and vice-president since the group began. They are a particularly dynamic combination and have complementary skills. This was identified by several of the participants from the community:

"There are several people around the organization that one could identify as being important people, but certainly there is a particularly important combination in terms of Jen and Carole. They seem to balance each other so much... (Carole is) about to explode and Jen... is by no means inarticulate or anything like that, she's much more the sort of capable person who works to put things together and I mean has just as much passion and drive when all is said and done but doesn't display it in exactly the same way as Carole. I think they make a very exceptional team. I think that they are going to do great things down there in Kitchener and beyond."

"They are smart ladies, Carole and Jennifer, and I think they realize a lot and recognize a lot and I don't go there to teach them anything, I go there and I learn so darned much."

In the initial stages of the formation of the group, there was a fear among the members that there would be a backlash against them by their social service field

workers because of their involvement with Mothers and Others Making Change. Because of this fear, it was decided that the president of the organization would act as a "spokesperson" for the members of the group. The members believe that Carole acts as their "voice" in the community.

"Carole promised us that she would be our voice and say what we want to say including expressing our anger. She's says these things on our behalf rather than having us expose ourselves by making statements. In this matter we feel open enough to talk about exactly how we feel knowing that Carole will get the repercussions and not us. That way we feel safe."

This process also serves to reduce the fear the members have of reprisals for their "speaking out".

### *Funding*

Funding is a major problem for the organization. There never is enough money to do all the things that the group would like to be able to do - such as publish a regular newsletter or have money for gas to go to meetings and conferences or to rent or borrow a truck to obtain some donated furnishings or food. There have been times when the membership believed that there would be no MOMC the next day and then something would happen. Somehow, the organization has always managed to survive - with the help of kind donations from supportive community people and churches, grants from the Secretary of State and presently, funding from PLURA, a multi-denominational funding body. Nonetheless, the organization survives on a month-to-month basis with the constant fear that they will run out of funds by the end of the month.

"I always managed to have money every time I went there (to MOMC)... The Lord works in mysterious ways. I've seen us pray for something and a miracle would happen just like that and half of us didn't even believe in God. But I used to think that God had his hand in (MOMC)... because I've seen just at the crucial moment, it would come through somebody else. For instance, I didn't have the money for the rent on the centre this month and I talked about it all month. On Tuesday they called me from the \_\_\_\_\_ Church (and had a donation for us). They haven't given us a cheque for two years! You think there ain't a God? I had no hope whatsoever."

One of the reasons that the organization has not been able to obtain funding is that they view themselves very much as an organization devoted to lobbying against the government. In order to obtain funding, the group must apply for a Registered Charitable Number. This they will not do.

"We didn't know who to ask for a grant. We had to get a list of people that funded. We had to go and ask (Social Planning Council) who we could get funding from. I went up to the United Way. I went everywhere, and they all turned me away. They tried to talk to me. They tried to tell me that I had to have a Registered Charitable Number. And I didn't know what that was and I couldn't understand it when they tried to explain it... I think it's the government's way of telling you that they will give you money on the condition that you do not picket, lobby, rally, demonstrate or say anything against the government... We didn't qualify at all! It was also the government's way of controlling charity... I decided that I didn't want it and I talked to (other members)... and we talked to the people too. And they said: 'No, we don't want it because we can't shut our mouths'."

One community member in particular empathizes with the position the group is in regarding this issue. On the one hand if they wish to obtain funding, they need to have charitable status. On the other hand, getting that status implies "buying into the system".

"I know philosophically, one of the dilemmas they're in, in terms of applying for charitable status, is that in a sense it's buying into the system. And I think that's going to be an issue for them all along. They're in a tight spot. If they want to be doled some programs and access things in the community, they can't really do that until they're recognized as a non-profit group - which means that they have to buy into the system. That's a tough one for them! I mean in some ways, in theory, it makes a lot of sense for them to stay out of the system, and work from where they're at."

The members of the group do not wish to become involved with the process of obtaining a Registered Charitable Status. They view this very much as being in conflict with their goals.

### *Changes in the Organization*

Over the past three years, there have been changes within the group. One of the major changes has been that there is now a centre, "The Voice of the People", at which the group keeps clothing, some food and supplies and is able to have a weekly meeting. This is viewed by some in the community as a statement about the stability of the organization.

"...securing a headquarters or an office, really says a couple of things. I mean that it says the group definitely has some stability, even though they may view it as a fledgling organization. I think it's MOMC, the people, I think it's their way of making a statement: 'Hey we're going to be here for a while folks, so you better learn how to deal with us'."

Although the community views the acquisition of a centre as a symbol of stability, the president feels disappointed in what has been done as opposed to what her dreams and ideal vision of what a centre could be:

"I started really yakking off about this centre. I wanted to have beds, I wanted to have food, anybody got into trouble we could help them, I was some idealist, I'll tell you that. I really had big plans and nothing to back me up. I didn't know that it was going to be so hard for poor people to get anything like that... You learn as you go along and now that I've got the centre, all of the plans that I had made for the centre, none of them really came true for my expectations. Because I found out that I couldn't do that anyway. I wouldn't be allowed to. You have to have all this insurance and everything... Once I got the space, I realized all the little technicalities that prevents you from (doing what we wanted to do)... we ended up getting some food... We got a place for people to steam off..."

Another change in the status of MOMC is that the community believes that the organization has more credibility and support from within the community. There is also the potential for more resources to become available to them but once again, the issue of the charitable status blocks many of those resources.

"My perception would be that they have a lot more credibility and resources available to them. I think part of that is just the evolvement of the group, they're evolving, they have a board now, they have a centre now, which I think is a major step... they certainly have a base of support out there. And my perception is that's a lot greater now than it would have been two and half years ago... they're more recognized in the community, which gives them more clout in terms of asking for resources."

The group has also become the "spokesperson" for the poor in Kitchener-Waterloo. If there is an issue in the local paper regarding poverty or welfare, the organization is contacted for a comment. Both the members of the community and of the organization recognize the importance of this media coverage.

"Back in the early 80's when I began working with MMC there was seldom a news story about someone on social assistance, and now it's very common, very frequent. When something negative comes out, then there is now a group that the press can go to get a client comment from, and I think that is excellent... it is very good to have a client voice there to be heard."

"We were just welfare bums when we started. That is what society thought of us. It is different now, when they hear the name MOMC, they know what you are talking about now. We are not just a back burner group any more. Then that is due to the demonstrations, being in the media, that has been a lot of it, being in the media. The public is hearing our opinion. It's not the politician's opinion any more, it's the poor speaking for themselves."

Mothers and Others Making Change is an organization which has very little structure. Although there is a management committee which operates in an advisory capacity, all decisions are made by the members of the group. Over the past two years, there has been an increase in the resources available to the group - they now have an information and resource centre and access to some food - and there has been an increase in the credibility of the group as well as in the community's awareness of the organization.

### Community Level

#### *Community Understanding of MOMC*

In interviewing the members of the community, it became evident that only one participant had an understanding of what MOMC really is.



"When a person comes into MOMC they find that they are like a lot of other people and that the struggles that they have, have been the struggles that other people have had... And I think it's a very, very profound sense that people find again that there's hope or they aren't the scum of the earth or that they're not a bunch of welfare bums, or whatever else society wants to say to them and it's a profound change because here are other people who are like me and here are other people whose story is like my story. They gain a really good sense of hope that they will someday gain control of their lives again and that they don't have to...(see) themselves as bad people. And that's something that MOMC gives them, an open door, the light comes in... Primarily, they have a freedom to share what's really happened to them, they have a freedom to tell their story, I think a lot of people who are on family benefits and welfare don't have a lot of opportunities to really tell exactly what's happened to them and be listened to by people who are... peers... The other thing that happens is that people begin to take leadership in the organization, and when they take leadership in the organization, many people find that they're respected by other people... I think something very profound happens to people when they're taken seriously and I think MOMC gives... people a door where they can speak and tell their story and be taken seriously... MOMC works for some changes in the social welfare system. That's probably the hardest thing that they could possibly do, it's easier to change yourself than to change the system or to change other people than to change the system. And that's slow and it's very, very difficult. But, there is in the midst of the social change in the community organization process, we not only develop leaders, some people see YES! that some changes have occurred, that there are some more monies, that some changes can happen - they're slow, far, far too slow - they take a lot of energy. But it gives people a sense that if their children would end up in the same kind of predicament, it won't be as bad as it was for them. And I think that social change is a good part of the MOMC."

Most members of the community and politicians focused on the social action activities of MOMC, viewing them as a militant organization as they have been depicted in the local media.

"People sort of might be aware that MOMC's around and have heard about them, but really don't know much about them. And people who know about them, their perceptions are primarily based on what they read in the press, so they see them as fairly militant."

"...it's viewed by the people locally in the bureaucracy.... as a very kind of, revolutionary, left-wing group perhaps that wants change and wants it now. And recognizing inequities in the system, and even though they recognize inequities in the system and for good reasons, I mean they don't want to work through the system for effective, positive change."

One community member focused more on the positive self-help aspects of the group, acknowledging that there is always someone available to members of MOMC. "I just know that they get a lot of calls from desperate people and they always seem to find the time to deal with them, it seems to me!"

Generally, however, the impressions that have been conveyed in the press are the ones that the community sees as being what MOMC is. Community members generally view MOMC as a social action organization, few recognized the self-help and education aspects of the group.

#### *Linkages to the Community*

Mothers and Others Making Change, as outlined in the history section, began very early to develop a network of organizations within the community on which they could depend. Initially, that network was a source of information and support to the group. Later, as MOMC became better known in the community, the members were invited to sit on community boards. The vice-president, Jennifer Myers, has many linkages within the community and speaks on behalf of MOMC at many meetings. However, more than one member is involved in this process. Currently, MOMC has representation at meetings of the following organizations and/or have representatives from the organizations who attend meetings of MOMC:

- Community Nutrition Workers Project
- Collective Kitchens
- Best Starts Proposal Committee
- Best Starts Coalition
- Social Assistance Employment and Employability Committee (SEEC)
- December 6th Coalition (violence against women)
- Sand Hills Community Development Inc.
- Waterloo-Wellington Federation of Tenants' Associations
- Cooperative housing boards (Bread and Roses/Changemakers' Coop)
- St. John's Soup Kitchen
- Wilfrid Laurier University
- Social Income Recipients' Advisory Association
- John Howard Society
- Reception House

- Advisory committee for information fair through the Working Centre and Canada Employment
- Access to Permanent Housing Committee
- Day Care Coalition
- Anselma House
- Multicultural Festival
- Kitchener-Waterloo Sexual Assault Centre
- Social Planning Council
- Various churches
- The Core Ministry
- public speaking regarding creation of violence-free zones in the Coop community

The members have supported actions by the Kitchener-Waterloo Sexual Assault Centre, the Labour Council, the Women's Day Coalition, and the Day Care Coalition. The members have contacts in the community and members of the community contact MOMC for input into matters that affect those who live in poverty.

In addition to contact with the media and with other organizations, MOMC received a grant from the Secretary of State for the purpose of public education, very early in its organizational history. This grant enabled the president and vice-president and at times, other members of the group, to embark on a series of speaking engagements designed to increase public awareness about issues of poverty. These workshops were initially presented three or four times each week to church organizations, university classes and local service groups.

"Community support, activism, we're getting donations from people who didn't like poverty organizations because of what they represented at one time. Carole, Jen have gone out on speaking engagements to churches, to schools, I mean, school kids have even gone out and gone on food drives and done things that are totally fantastic. The participatory action of the community has been just fantastic... Carole, all she has to do is put out the word that she needs and the stuff is there... people respect... what the group is doing."

The members of the group also became involved in working with the New Democratic Party during both a Federal and a Provincial election campaign. They worked on local election campaigns, attended political meetings and clearly identified themselves with the party.

"...there were some real direct connections between Bob Rae (leader of the New Democratic Party) and a number of the poverty groups across the province... So they are dealing with a group of individuals or decision makers now that obviously have or share their principles and values, and I think they see that as a positive."

In addition to the above collaborative ventures, the group has also participated in and initiated some rallies, lobbying efforts and political demonstrations. These efforts received much press coverage and have served to increase public awareness about the issues of poverty.

"I think that everywhere that we go (and demonstrate) that we're creating enough attention for them to know what the issue is, so that comes across. It's a very non-violent way of doing things... I don't think that we're radicals in any way, shape or form, if we don't agree with something, we should, you know, get up to it."

The organization, from its inception has had ties to the local community. They are often asked for their opinion both by service agencies and by the media. They are represented on many community boards and have been involved in supporting local political candidates at both the provincial and federal levels. They have many linkages to the wider community.

### *Changes in the Community*

During the process of interviewing the members of MOMC, community agency representatives and politicians, the participants were asked if they had seen any changes within the community as a result of the actions of and input from the members of MOMC. The responses indicate that there is a perception that there have been changes. Although many of these changes are difficult to quantify, there was some consistency in those differences that were mentioned during the interviews.

*Increased access to hampers.* Increased access to hampers was probably the most commonly mentioned change involving the actions of MOMC. Initially, it was

necessary for those who needed a food hamper and who were on social assistance to contact their field worker from Regional Social Services to be eligible to receive a hamper - a process that was not always easy and that the members found to be degrading. This process was changed so that contact no longer needs to be made with the social service worker. All of the community members and politicians mentioned this change as being a result of the actions of MOMC.

"One of the things MOMC really worked on complaining about the system where if you were on social assistance and you wanted a food hamper... the first question you were asked was whether you were on social assistance, and if you were then you needed a referral from the worker, and then you had to track down the worker, and probably the worker wasn't in that day, so there was a lot of complaints about that in terms of why can't we just call directly and get assistance. There was a change made in the system... where the Region and the House of Friendship and the Salvation Army and the Cambridge Food Coop and Woolwich Community Services, that people would just call us directly and we would give them a hamper, they wouldn't need a referral from the worker, and they could get four of them a year... they certainly spear-headed some of that stuff. And by and large... that's worked out fine... There's been an explosion in terms of hamper numbers after that, but that's certainly not just because of what happened in the region, there was a lot of other factors."

Although all of the community members mentioned access to food hampers as a change, not all viewed this as a significant change.

"I think in terms of local issues, they've raised them. They caused House Of Friendship to take a look at its food hamper program in a very serious way. I don't know whether they would see that there were any changes but at least (the program was) really reviewed."

Carole, the president of MOMC does not view the change in access to hampers as a major change. Her goal was to have food available to the members of MOMC at all times.

"There has not been that much of a change and I hate it when people say: 'Well, look at the big change that she made!' I hate that... because there was not a big change. Just because we don't have to phone our field workers doesn't mean that you get any more food! I mean the change that I wanted was that you get easier access to the hampers... The rules still apply. It's a little bit less degrading, but it doesn't put any more food in your mouth. And that's important!"

One community member viewed this change as considerably more significant than some others who were interviewed. Although there are no quantitative data available, this participant believes that breakfast programmes for school children were no longer necessary because of the impact of increased access to the hampers.

"The access to food hampers... is not an insignificant change! One of the by-products, there were a number of early morning school breakfast programs running and kids stopped coming to them. The numbers started to diminish after the access to food hampers increased. The only reason that we could come up with that the school breakfast programs diminished was that there was more food getting into homes. So I think it is not a small thing to say that the only thing that has changed is the access to food hampers because I think that's a major benefit. Kids are coming to school better fed."

There has been an increase in the accessibility of food hampers to those on social assistance mostly because of the decrease in the justification process necessary to obtain one. There is some disagreement about the significance of this change but most agree that at least the approach is more humane.

*Increased community awareness of MOMC.* Another change that the participants believe has occurred within the community is an increased awareness of MOMC. The group members see this as a real positive because they believe that they are being heard and the community gives to the organization.

"You get a little feedback and that's very important. Because when you get the feedback people are listening... They know that we're there and they believe in us, 'cause they give to us. And it's just showing a lot of love, that's the change."

"The awareness, like a lot of churches are now aware and their donations, they collect from the community... A lot more people know about MOMC."

Community members also view this as important and positive for the group, as a step towards changing public opinion.

"They have raised their profile in the community. People know who they are, where two years ago or less they didn't know who they were. And of course, the first step is in awareness and that sort of thing. That's been one positive thing... I think they begin to make a difference in people's hearts when they tell personal stories."

There is an increased awareness of the organization, Mothers and Others Making Change as seen by the amount of media coverage that they receive and by the number of donations that they receive. The community is more aware that MOMC exists. This is viewed as a step towards change.

*Increased awareness of poverty issues.* An increased awareness of issues that affect those who live in poverty is another change that was mentioned frequently. There is believed to be an increase in awareness of the community in general of stereotyped images that affect those who live in poverty. "People are becoming a little more sensitized to the fact that not everybody... on Family Benefits or GWA are there because they wanted to be."

Also mentioned was an increase in the awareness of the issues that affect those who live in poverty.

"Raising the social awareness of the community about those issues... the House of Friendship was not distributing the hampers and that was what their mandate called for. The discrepancies in the... discretionary expense that the field workers may or may not authorize to each client. The fact that MOMC is fighting it is making the community aware that those discrepancies existed."

Another community member viewed this as part of a more generalized social movement that includes a growing awareness of the issues for those who live in poverty.

"I think that the group may be a part of an increased focus on social issues and problems in poverty, and at this very same time that there's an increased understanding, there's also an increased backlash happening. And you have journalists like Diane Francis being very negative about the realities of people in poverty. But I think that there has been a larger more positive impact and a growing social movement that this group has been a part of."

Whether as part of a larger social movement or as a result of increased attention to the issues and image of those who live in poverty, there is a consensus among those interviewed that there has been an increase in public awareness of poverty issues.

*Increased accountability of agencies to consumers.* Also mentioned by almost all of the community members who were interviewed was the apparent increase in accountability of the service agencies to the consumer. They believe that Mothers and Others Making Change acts as a "watch-dog" group in relation to social services in Kitchener-Waterloo.

"It's very difficult to quantify some of the changes. But where people, particularly in positions of authority, would have no regard to... some suggested change. Now they are a little more sensitive. They say: 'Hey we have to be a little more careful because we've got essentially a watch-dog group out there'... I know that decisions are being made, being made in a much more sensitive manner than otherwise would have happened, had it not been for Mothers and Others."

"There is an effective and loud voice out there to complain about mistreatment. It makes you think a bit more about how you treat people. But I can't document that anything has changed."

"I think they're a really interesting group, although, they've been sort of a fly in the ointment sometimes, I don't think it's hurt. They haven't hurt other social service agencies to have them around! They're sort of the devil's advocate, that's the role they played sometimes, that's okay."

Community members indicated that, although they could not document any change, they believe that there is an increased awareness of the potential impact of decisions being made at some social service agencies.

"Locally I think that we have had a very sensitive and aware Health and Social Services Committee for as long as I've been here. But having groups like MOMC active in the community I think helps keep people on their toes; I think helps keep up their level of awareness and consciousness of what is happening. So there aren't concrete things that I can point to again that show that there's been any difference in how decisions are being made. But I think that decisions are made with a very good level of awareness and I think that the group was a part of what calls for that accountability, for that level."



These community members also indicated that the actions of MOMC have caused them to examine their own policies more carefully. This was viewed as a positive process by these participants.

"MOMC as a group, has provided many interesting discussions in social services agencies across town! And I think that's been good, because I think they're challenging other groups like (local social service agency) to take a look at what we're doing."

"When they are in conflict with some one, it certainly... causes that organization to examine its own policies and I think that's a very important process for every one of us. So, in that way, yeah, I guess that's how changes will come about, by forcing people to examine what they are doing and they may find out that what they are doing is fine but they need to examine it nonetheless."

The members of MOMC also believe that they have had an impact on how those in power make decisions.

"They (social service agencies) are changing in their attitude towards the poor people... Their attitude towards us has changed in the aspect that they know they can't get away with everything any more because the poor are starting to stand up for themselves, more than what they did before. And things get done quicker... (there is) a lot more respect."

The members also see that those in direct contact with them are being more careful. "The workers have found out the people in MOMC are not afraid any more of the system and they are scared. They're listening more now." "They know now that if there is a complaint from a member of MOMC that they've been discriminated, Carole is going to be there and they don't like that thought."

There is then, in the opinion of those who were interviewed, an increase in accountability of the staff and decision-makers of local social service organizations. Most see this as being related to the fact that there is a "watch-dog" group monitoring the actions and decisions of social service agencies.

The participants in this research project believe that there have been changes in the community as a result of the actions of the members of MOMC. These changes include more humane access to food hampers through the House of Friendship,

increased awareness of the organization, increased awareness of issues that affect those who live in poverty and increased accountability of the staff and decision-makers in local social service agencies.

### *Processes of Community Change*

There is consensus among the participants of this research project that there have been changes in the community as a result of the actions and input from MOMC. The question that is not so easily answered is: How did these changes occur? The process involved in changing access to food hampers is the one that is the most clear although there is some indication from some of the comments made by those politicians and community members who were interviewed that there are more processes occurring. The process of change of access to food hampers will be addressed initially, then other comments will be analyzed.

*Political lobbying as a process for change.* This was identified as one means of creating change. One of the first goals of MOMC was to have food available to the members of the group. The president of MOMC, on behalf of the members of the group, approached the Food Bank of Waterloo Region with a request for food for the membership. Despite offers to help by sorting and packing food, the mandate of that organization only allows food to be given to organizations who have a Registered Charitable Status. No food was available to them because, as explained above, the group was not willing to enter into the process of obtaining a Registered Charitable Number.

"...And I wanted to help them but I wanted to feed them. I knew what it was like having to borrow money in the middle of the month to try to keep going. For those who didn't have family or friends that they could borrow from, it was worse for them, much worse. And it was also bad for the working poor... I did not know that there was a food bank, so that was out of the question. We knew that you could get a hamper from the House of Friendship, but I didn't know that there was a stipulation that you could only get one every four months. So the first thing I thought about, was getting food for the people. And when I found out I couldn't get any food, I became nasty! I was dirty, right ugly. I mean because I had gone to the House of Friendship and then I had found out about the Food Bank, and I had gone there (and was told that even if the people worked there for a week, they had to have a Registered Charitable Number to get food)... It was just like beating my head against the wall, I couldn't believe that these terrible things were happening!"

When the members discovered that they could not obtain food from the food bank, they started talking further about the difficulties that they have obtaining food hampers. A decision was made to contact the local newspaper, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record about their concerns. They were able to make a contact at the newspaper.

"So that was the first thing I started opening my mouth up about around town. I said: 'What should I do? I should call the newspapers!' and I did... and I said: 'If I write down what I'm mad about, will you do something about it?' and (the contact person) said: 'Sure, I'll do something about it.' So I wrote (the newspaper) a letter ...and told (them) all that stuff, and they put that in the paper. Then all hell broke loose! I guess we got known in a hurry. I wanted to get known that we were there as a group and everything but we wanted the public to know that you couldn't get your hands on food."

At the same time, contact was made with a local politician about the issue.

"They identified a problem out there as a result of the number of the calls they received. They had called me after identifying that problem. They decided, and I think to their credit, they decided that: 'Hey, this system has got to change' - among their own group without consulting me on that. They did have, of course, the courtesy to forewarn me that they were coming to Health and Social Services Committee regarding that issue."

This politician was able to offer the group some support and direction to a point where they appeared before the Health and Social Services Committee to be heard about their concerns. The members of the Committee had of course read the articles in the newspaper: "Welfare Mom Says Hungry Can't Get Food" (Kitchener-Waterloo Record,

October 10, 1988, p. B1). One community member clearly remembered the articles and their impact but was unaware of the process.

"She (Carole) was saying people on welfare were being deprived of food... some of the stuff that she was saying, it got to the political level... And that's why some of the changes were made, in terms of getting four a year, that's regionally subsidized... But I remember the press, there certainly was some press at the time... I don't remember how involved MOMC was, say with the discussions at the region. Whether they were even a part of that, the change in the system. Like they certainly helped spear-head it, but when it got to final meetings with the region, I don't know how involved they were, but I do know that politicians got involved and wondered why people weren't getting any food... that certainly was part of it... I don't think the change would have happened, or wouldn't have happened near as quickly had MOMC not gotten so interested in it."

A local politician believes that the organization was "politically smart" in their approach to the food hamper issue. They went beyond their concerns to draw attention to the issue at hand.

"Politically, I think, in some respects politically I think they are very smart because they took the issue beyond what some may call the balance of fairness. I mean they made some pretty wide accusations about mismanagement of the system. And I'm not so sure their accusations were all legitimate accusations within the bounds of fairness. But it's kind of like a negotiating process where you know if you want a dollar an hour raise, then you ask for five and you work back. And that's what they did on this issue. So I think politically, on this particular issue, they showed some political smarts and good for them."

One community member identified how the process of objecting to the way an agency operates in the newspaper could potentially affect that agency.

"They (agencies) need to have a good reputation in this community. They need to be seen as responsible and as carrying out a mandate of helping to feed the poor. When they are publicly attacked, it undermines their credibility... if their credibility is undermined, they risk losing the kind of community support they need in order to carry out their mandate. So, that's what happens... So anything that causes anybody to stop and have a look and question, is a good thing."

With regards to the food hamper issue, then, the group decided to use political methods to help resolve their concerns. They publicized their concerns and obtained the support of those in power - a local politician. This seemed to be a powerful tool because

the method of distribution was changed fairly quickly - the agencies needed to retain their support in the community. The change, however, was not what the group had requested but was more of a compromise worked out among the agency, the politicians and MOMC. Although there is some concern about whether or not there was a significant change in the system, a change was made as a result of the actions of the members of Mothers and Others Making Change.

*Confrontation.* Confrontation was also identified as a process for change. There is no doubt but that the approach taken by the members of MOMC has been confrontational at times - they have engaged in lobbying, demonstrating, picketing and rallying - both alone and in conjunction with other organizations. Many of the community members who were interviewed had an opinion about whether MOMC should use a confrontative approach to the issues about which they wanted the public to become aware or whether they should use a strictly collaborative method of dealing with the issues. There certainly is a divided opinion among those who were interviewed. Several community members see the confrontative process as useless. They believe that it only serves to create awareness of an issue for a very short period of time but that the long-term effect is to alienate supportive members of the community.

"It's confrontational and the impact of that I find to be less effective because I think there's some loss of credibility and some loss of useful support from liaisons... There's that kind of automatic defensiveness of our staff, when we know we're working very hard, and it sets up an adversarial relationship."

"I think there is a risk of alienating people if you are too aggressive, too negative about other people who are trying their darndest to help. I think we have to be very careful not to alienate."

There was also some concern expressed about the impact of this confrontational approach on social service agencies.

"What is Carole out there saying about us? And what if people start hearing it and saying: '(That agency) doesn't do what it says it does, so why should I support them?'"

Those community members interviewed believe that a consultative approach would be more effective in attaining the goals of the group for change.

"In terms of alternate ways they could have been more effective in those kinds of things, I would see it as being potentially more beneficial to ask for meetings and set up times to meet."

"Fifteen years ago, protest was an acknowledged means of social change and of communicating your displeasure with the system. Only we've come out of a society that acknowledges confrontation as being legitimate to one that sees consultation as being the legitimate way of dealing with dispute. And if you're still stuck in confrontation, and the decision makers are looking for consultation, you're in the wrong arena."

Others in the community, however, saw this confrontational approach as being useful as a means of public education. It is a means of drawing media attention to the problem(s) identified by the group.

"It's useful as a form of public education. I don't think it's particularly useful as a form of changing policy. And a lot more public has to be educated in order to change policies fundamentally or you need a change in government. I see it as heightening an issue; I see it as a way of communicating an issue to the public at large because it gets media attention."

Others saw it as one of the only avenues that the poor have to assert their own power.

"And marches are about the only, marches and individual advocacy... and education and self-esteem building and leadership, are the only tools of an MOMC. They'll never be the people in power."

Another community member, despite a view that networking may have been more effective, concedes that the approach taken by MOMC was useful in getting attention and that any other method would not have been successful in achieving this.

"They would have gotten more mileage out of networking with other agencies rather than taking this approach. I don't know if that would have meant they would have had to change their style in terms of a political level... style or not, in terms of being more militant, to me really isn't the issue, I mean what they've done is they've gotten attention. And, I don't know if they would have gotten it any other way!"

There is then a division of opinion about whether the confrontational methods used by the members of MOMC are useful. Some community members see it as one of the only methods the group has to demonstrate their power. Others see it as a short term means of drawing attention to a particular issue. Others believe that it destroys the credibility of the group. Regardless, confrontation, whether through lobbying, demonstrating, and political means serves to increase public awareness of the group and to challenge the policies of agencies.

*Collaboration.* Collaboration was also identified as a process for change. There are also some collaborative ways in which the members of MOMC are able to influence opinion about some issues. Through participation on other Boards, their voice is heard on a regular basis in Kitchener-Waterloo. "There's been some sticky issues, I wouldn't begin to say today that all the air is cleared but I think it's a lot better now than say three years ago."

Very little was mentioned by the members of the community who were interviewed about the collaborative approaches taken by the members of MOMC. Perhaps this is because very little is known by other agencies about any collaboration that has transpired with other agencies. Interestingly, one of the community members who was critical of the style of MOMC also acknowledged that nobody else learns about the results of the process of consultation.

"If it's consultation, nobody knows! You have to be willing to have people not know that you are effective. And one of the reasons that you're more effective is that the organization that's doing the changing can claim it did it on its own. Nobody wants to be seen to be forced to do anything."

Consultation is used as a method of obtaining community support, but very little about this was known by those interviewed.

*Advocacy.* Advocacy can also be seen as a process for change. This process for change was mentioned both by community members and by members of MOMC. This is seen as an important way for the members of MOMC to create awareness in the community and perhaps to have the members of the community become more careful about how programmes are implemented. They also stressed that the system in Waterloo Region is flexible enough to accept the challenges by the members.

"I guess what I would say is they're always there, and sometimes it's the little things as well as the bigger things. I think they've advocated for people in the social services, so I would, if I were a... regional social services worker, I would be more careful because I would know that some MOMC people were around... For example, if I worked with a person, and I'm not very careful about what the benefits are that person should have and that person then goes and talks to somebody at MOMC and finds out you're getting different benefits than the person I worked with, that person is going to go back to me and ask for a review, or ask for me to re-look at it, or ask why you and I aren't visiting or why that person and you aren't the same or why these benefits aren't there. And I think that's... empowering of the person who is - for the client. And I think that's a very important... well the system could just sort of say: 'Well, don't ask us any questions any more because you got what you get'. But I think we've got an open enough system here in the Waterloo region, that if there is a problem it probably will be redressed, you know there will be some redress. And I think it's very important to have MOMC out there."

*Public education.* Another means of creating change is public education. Those interviewed believe that educating the members, agencies and students are all important means to achieve the goal of community change.

The members of the community interviewed stressed how important it is for the members to talk among themselves about issues that affect them.

"I think they've done a good job of advocacy and I think people in MOMC talk and they keep talking with other people and they talk to people in their neighbourhood, and I think people who are workers in the system need to be vigilant because MOMC is around."

The president of MOMC receives telephone calls from people in the community on a daily basis and shares the information that she has with them.



"There's a lot of changes just because of MOMC...There's a lot of people, even the ones that don't come to the meetings that know how to deal with their field workers now... People in the community know that they can call Mothers and Others when they have a question, or if they're being kicked out or what lawyer to call and I deal more with people in the community on my telephone than I do with my own members. I get calls all the time!.. People do want to know, people do not want to remain ignorant. We were made ignorant by society... we were not meant to know!"

Sometimes this educating process takes the form of protests - in a way that is educational to those against whom the protest is organized. The group was, for example, successful in educating Regional Council about the need for day care subsidies.

"The other issue I think that readily comes to mind is day care spaces and allotment throughout the region... They organized an extremely good protest in terms of lining up delegations at the Regional Council to speak on the matter... so most of the members of the Regional Council obviously saw the benefits of providing child care spots. And even though there is a cost to that, recognized a lot greater cost than not providing them. So they were pretty instrumental in getting that kind of issue resolved to their benefit."

The attention the media has given issues that affect members of MOMC is also a means to increase public awareness and support. The members of MOMC are very aware of this process.

"People are more aware of things that are going on in Kitchener-Waterloo because -through articles that we write, through articles that are written on us same as the... TV, if they see us picketing and that... Doesn't make them want to get involved, not that much of a change. It's just something to inform them, to let them know."

The cooperation that the members of MOMC have given to students from both universities and community colleges has also been very important in raising awareness. "For them to do theses or papers raises their awareness and in turn, raises the awareness of the people that are in those classrooms."

The public speaking that has been undertaken has also served to increase the awareness of the community about issues of poverty.

"We were four to five days a week, Jenny and I were going out speaking to churches, to universities and anything that came up... we were there, we were speaking, we were opening our mouths all over the place over every little thing that happened... We were busy!.. We were always in the papers or on TV or something. That helped to get us known too... We're known right straight across the country... We're in the Women's Almanac!"

Public education is a process for change that has been undertaken by the members of MOMC. Through public speaking, communicating with each other, serving as a resource, media coverage, protests and involvement with students, the public becomes more aware of the issues.

There are changes that have occurred in the community according to those who were interviewed. There is some question about the efficacy of those changes but those interviewed believe that there has been an increase in the access to food hampers, an increase in awareness of MOMC, an increase in the awareness of issues that affect those who live in poverty and a change in how services are delivered and how decisions are made in social service agencies in the community. There is some consensus about how these changes have occurred. Through political lobbying, confrontation, collaboration, advocacy activities, and public education, the community is aware that there is an organization "out there watching" what happens to those who live in poverty.

#### *Community Concerns and Suggestions For MOMC*

During the course of the interviews, the community members and politicians were asked for their impressions of the organization Mothers and Others Making Change. As outlined above, most had a favourable overall impression of the group. However, some expressed concern about the style of the leader and about her representativeness of the group as a whole. Some also offered positive suggestions for the organization and direction of the group.

Some members of the community view the leader's style as being very confrontational and at times beyond what is reasonable. They question whether or not Carole is truly representative of the members of the group.

"I think where the difficulty has been, what upsets some people, and made difficult to work with MOMC, is their style. And that would be, particularly would be more Carole's style than anyone else. She has a tendency to sometimes be a bull in a china shop! and just really tear strips off of people without thinking of what she's saying. And that's, in terms of my perception, I think that's been to her detriment in terms of relating to other community agencies. Everyone's a bit gun-shy in terms of Carol and what she's going to say because you never know what form it's going to come back, whether she'll twist it. Whether all the facts will come back the way you gave them to her! Jenny, I've worked with both and Jenny is a very good person to work with. So then that's been the one difficulty, that Carole has sometimes, it's been hard sometimes to see MOMC with, or see beyond Carole. And MOMC has been Carole Silliker. Which isn't true, there's a lot of other people involved."

Another community member believes that perhaps this style is necessary and serves to increase the power of the organization. It certainly gets the attention of the agency.

"I can understand Carole, I think she's very passionate about the stuff she talks about, and when she gets going she sometimes forgets some of the politically expedient things she should do, which would help her in the long run... maybe Carole needs to be the way she is to rock some boats. I mean, that's her style and she does it."

There is also some concern about whether or not Carole truly represents the members of MOMC or if she is a self-appointed spokesperson.

"There's a perception that she doesn't delegate her stuff, that she does all of her stuff on her own, and that someday she's going to wear herself out if she doesn't change some of her style! That's a perception I think that exists in the community. That Carole takes a lot of the stuff on herself, and is sort of a self-appointed spokesperson for the poor. I think the difficulty sometimes is knowing whether some of the stuff she says is more her own agenda, or whether it reflects the group. I've had lots of discussions with different people in the community... whether she truly represents the group or whether it's her own agenda."

"I guess one of the things that doesn't help the credibility in the sense of representativeness is the letterhead that says in very large print 'From the desk of Carole Sillicker', and then in little letters 'Mothers and Others Making Change'. So we see Carole's name first and we hear Carole's voice and the way of dealing with issues first, and that makes us wonder is this representative of the full group, or is the full group representative of our client community, and before we respond to something that's coming in a letter with Carole's voice we do have to ask ourselves this question."

There is some concern in the community about the style of the president of MOMC and about whether or not she is representative of the organization. The members of MOMC view this in a different way. As discussed above, when the organization began, a decision was made that, because of fears of retaliation by social service workers, Carole would be the person who spoke on behalf of the group. The letterhead was developed following this discussion with the assistance of an MSW student on placement with the organization. Carole is the spokesperson for the group in confrontative situations. This was a planned and purposeful means of achieving the goal of being heard. Her style is her own and arises from her own anger at the system and the blockages that have been placed in her way. As outlined above as well, the members of the group believe in their equality.

"(In MOMC), we're all the same. We're all just people, there's no importance laid on titles in MOMC. I'll tell you who lays the importance on the titles in MOMC, it's the people outside of our group. It's not our group that does that. And when I say my organization, I mean my people, my kind of people, it's not that they belong to me, it's that we're all the same."

From the community members interviewed, there were several recommendations about the organization of the group and about the direction that they should take in the future. Community members suggested that the workload needs to be shared more equally among the group members.

"I really think they need other people working as hard as Carole and Jenny, sharing the load in order to be more effective...to involve as many people as possible in the operation so that they can come to feel that they have some ownership in it, some responsibility for it... I would like to see if there were some way for them to become a little more organized. Although I like - there has to be spontaneousness, there has to be lots of room for mistakes, you don't have to be perfect or anything like that - but get a little bit more organized so that work can be shared and everyone can have a part in that. I think, I'm not sure if organization is the key to it."

Another concern expressed was a lack of long-term planning and goal setting. This person believes that it is necessary for the group to undergo a process of defining their role in the community more clearly.

"I think sometimes you get so caught up in the day to day stuff that happens, they really haven't as a group sat down and tried to look at some long term goals and objectives... So for MOMC as a group I really think they've got to sit down and say 'Okay what do we want to accomplish, let's try to define our role as a group. What's our mandate, what's our reason for being? And what's going to be our relationship with the new people in Queen's Park?'. I really question whether or not they've done that to any extent. I just don't see that has happened to this point in time."

One community member suggested that there should be more organization within the community; that the group build more community support. "I'd really love to see some more large scale organizing where MOMC built the broader community support and brought others in."

Another community member suggested that MOMC begin to address problems other than those involved with the social services department. This person believes that agencies not directly related to social services also need to be encouraged to change.

"I don't think anyone in direct service agencies has made any connection between what they do and social assistance recipients or low income people generally. The focus has all been on social assistance systems. And food hampers is an extension of social assistance, and the handle there would be because they are paid for by the Regional government through the social assistance budget. I haven't seen any impact on any other organizations in town. I know there are issues with hospitals, I know there are issues with counselling agencies, and other kinds of agencies. I know that there have been issues with public housing and nobody has gotten anywhere with North or South Waterloo Housing. I'm not sure why, or I'm not sure if the focus has been solely on social assistance or if it just appears as though the focus has just been solely on social assistance. I haven't noticed that there has been any effective change expected from social service organizations or helping organizations. If I were them, that's where I would be going next, to human service agencies across the board."

Another community member suggested that the group needs a full-time organizer and enough money to meet expenses. However, this suggestion was given with some reservations. This person does not want MOMC to become another service agency.

"I think it would be good if they got some money, you know for their room and for their rent, but I think if they took on staff other than a community organizer, or well, they kind of need a community organizer... I think they'd lose it if they got a care-giver staff person because what they would do is they might not give the kind of care and support that they need to give to each other. But I know a number of times Carole has wanted to get clothing together,... or to get those kinds of things together and I want to support MOMC but I will not support them in doing that kind of stuff, because I think they become a social agency... we're mandated to do these particular services, and I think MOMC has to stay a lot more loose, and I think they have to be directly controlled by lower income people,... who are often on government benefits, and I think they have to be there for each other. If they start to take on any counselling, other than peer counselling or a more institutional role, I think they could really be in trouble. And yet that is a tendency that all organizations have because then you become more, you can have a more normal flow of money coming in... it's a real temptation, you know and if they go that way it is, they'll still be supported, I'm not saying, but I think that the temptation could take them away from the cutting edge of what they really really do which is to support. And people would expect them to do certain things, rather than know when you're a part of MOMC you have to all pull together to make it go."

The community members suggest that the members of the organization share the workload with the president and vice-president, that they become more organized in

order to do so, that they clearly set and discuss long-term goals, and that they somehow obtain money to hire an organizer and pay rent for the support and information centre.

### *Potential For MOMC in the Community*

Most community members saw the role of MOMC as being very important in that hearing from those who have actually lived the experience of poverty is important to understanding and creating responsive social programmes.

"MOMC certainly has a right to be critical of other agencies, or government social services, who are working with people on social assistance, that really haven't lived the experience. That's a strength they have, at least in my perception, they're primarily people helping each other and they know what it's like not to have money for Hydro or food or not having an apartment."

"I see it as a grassroots movement of people who really know what the issues are all about because they've experienced it. And most of my experience has been with agencies who are trying to help people with their problems and I really think that real change is going to come from those who have experienced it and I think we have to start listening to these people... it's the voice of the people who know what it is and who experience it."

Many community members were able to see the potential that MOMC has in creating responsive and inclusive services where the people who need the services are in charge of them. They believe that there is a role for an organization that speaks for the poor.

"The way I see it in this community, we have some very good organizations, it is a very generous community has been my experience, a very responsible community that wants to do its duty to help people. But, everything is well organized, there are rules and guidelines and everything and it's all quite neat. MOMC doesn't fit in to that kind of category. I think, personally, that we have to have a major conversion to where the people who need the product or services or whatever it happens to be start having charge of them, being given charge of them. But that, as I say, is a major conversion and I don't think we can possibly expect it to happen overnight."

"I don't think that MOMC has all the answers for helping all the poor people in K-W either nor does (a social agency). It sort of takes all different groups. So I think they definitely have a role."

The members of the community are able to see the potential that there is within the community for Mothers and Others Making Change but this was conditional on the receipt of a non-profit registration number and structure.

"There's no regular system in place where we keep in contact... I think there's a great deal of interest in working with them if, the internal things get worked out in terms of the non-profit registration."

"We are looking for ways in which we can be more supportive of MOMC...I think we're looking for a more structured approach to helping."

In addition, a suggestion was made by a representative of the New Democratic Party that the organization could align with them without compromising their beliefs and values.

"I think they could align with the government, be very aware what their goals and objectives are and you know, just because you are working with somebody doesn't mean you have to compromise your position."

However, one community member believes that there is no potential for MOMC to influence policy at the political level.

"I know the governments respond primarily to votes and to campaign contributions, campaign contributors. Poor people tend not to vote and they tend not to make contributions to political parties. Period."

The community members who were interviewed, although generally unaware of the extensive role that MOMC plays in the lives of its members, for the most part, can see a role for MOMC in the planning and delivery of services and potentially to influence policy at the provincial level. Some of the cooperative roles suggested for MOMC were contingent on obtaining registered status - which MOMC views as a conflict of interest.

At the community level then, the members of the community who were interviewed were generally unaware of the extent of the role of MOMC in the lives of the members of the group. The community members believe that there have been some changes within the community but that these changes would be difficult to quantify. The processes for change that were identified include political lobbying, confrontation,



collaboration, advocacy activities, and public education. Community members do have some concerns and suggestions for the membership of MOMC and were supportive of the organization and encouraging about the potential of the group.

### Provincial/National Level

#### *Linkages: MOMC to Provincial Level*

The members of Mothers Making Change and then of Mothers and Others Making Change have been extensively involved in addressing several committees that have been commissioned over the past several years to examine the issues of poverty. One of the former members of Mothers Making Change was a member of the Social Assistance Review Committee (SARC) which was commissioned by the Ontario Liberal government to make recommendations about the reform of the social assistance system in the province (the Transitions report, 1988).

Since then, MOMC has also made submissions to the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC), a committee set up to monitor the progress of the implementation of the SARC report. MOMC's support in Kitchener was invaluable.

"A group - Interfaith Social Assistance Review Committee - that was formed at the same time that the provincial government formed the Social Assistance Review Committee to monitor, I think, the findings of the SARC committee and also any it was making on implementing any of the recommendations. It is an inter-church - well, it's interfaith - and they had hearings on September the 13th last fall (1990) to see if there had been any changes made as a result of the SARC recommendations... MOMC had a lot of input into that and I think they were well listened to and certainly are quoted in the report that has come out since then (Neighbour to neighbour, voices for change: Report of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition on Poverty in Ontario, Sept., 1990)."

"It was mostly the MOMC members that was speaking for these ISARC hearings. It was about 85% MOMC members that they got their information from... The churches lobbied for us... before the NDP's got in. That's what that was all about."

In addition to their involvement with these committees, the members of MOMC, as noted above, have also been involved with the New Democratic Party at the provincial level.

"MOMC has been very involved in the Transitions - SARC report process and have worked with the ISARC group on these hearings that we had in September of 1990. MOMC has been involved in the NDP Party... some of the members, not the organization itself, but some of the members have been very involved in the NDP Party."

Members of MOMC are also involved with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), a coalition of anti-poverty groups in Ontario. One of the members was intensely involved in the formation of that organization. Jennifer Myers, the vice-president of MOMC, was the recording secretary of the original steering committee and was elected as chairperson of the southwest region. The vice-president is also involved in a province-wide tenant's association - United Tenants of Ontario (UTOO) and the Southwest Tenants' Association. She is also a member of the Charter Committee for Poverty Issues - a nation-wide organization developed to challenge the Charter of Rights regarding poverty issues.

The members of MOMC have many connections with provincial and national organizations who are addressing issues of poverty. They have input into reports, politics, the social activist movement, tenancy issues and legal issues.

Before evaluating the impact at the provincial level of actions taken by MOMC in conjunction with other organizations, it is important to document the history and process involved in the anti-poverty social movement in Ontario. Then, other actions mentioned by those interviewed will be discussed. The processes and outcomes of those actions will subsequently be considered followed by comments regarding the potential at the provincial level and a description of considerations mentioned at the societal level.

#### *A Recent History of the Anti-Poverty Social Movement in Ontario*

During the years 1984 to 1990, there was much activity in Ontario regarding lobbying for change in the social assistance system. During the interviews with members

of MOMC, local community members, provincial level politicians and members of OCAP, some of the history of that time emerged. Some of the perceptions are contradictory but nonetheless, they are important to document in these results.

*The Social Assistance Review Committee process.* Probably the beginning of the movement was a report issued by the New Democratic Party of Ontario entitled, The Other Ontario: A report on poverty in Ontario (June, 1984, The Ontario New Democratic Party Caucus).

"You remember that Other Ontario, that booklet that was put together by the NDP and that was the NDP's original idea, hearing from the poor people themselves... They went from region to region to put this Other Ontario together. Then the SARC and then the ISARC hearings were last year."

"In July of 1986, the Ontario (Liberal) government established the Social Assistance Review Committee, an independent committee charged with undertaking a public review of the province's social assistance system." (Transitions, 1988). Their work culminated in the release of Transitions: The report of the Social Assistance Review Committee in the spring of 1988. One Liberal politician clearly remembers the extensive process of preparing that report.

"Our committee itself said as they went around, they rewrote their report half a dozen times. They would think after five or six meetings: 'Okay, we've got the feeling now.' And then they would come to the seventh meeting and people would make a case and: 'God, never thought of that!'. So they'd have to redraft it again and then seven or eight more meetings, they'd have to do it again. They said we were continually rewriting that report. When they finally handed it to (the Liberal government), they said: 'We feel good about this one. We really feel that we've touched the bases.' While there are probably 100 people in the province who are saying: 'Well, that's not what I said', it is a good compilation of what the broadest base of the public said."

The report focused on the needs of those who live in poverty in Ontario. A Liberal politician offered a concise view of the recommendations of the committee.

"People who are receiving social benefits now, are not receiving enough. They need more money, they need more support. The second thing they said was that the program was essentially a disincentive program, in other words, there is no reason to try and improve yourself. There is no reason to try and get off social assistance. And that should be changed too... The third point they made was that there were a number of groups cited, particularly they would refer to the working poor, people who are very much marginalized, who from a net income point of view at the end of the week or the end of the month were not substantially better off than people who were on social assistance. And that if we didn't start speaking to that group, we were going to end up having more and more of them turn up on the social assistance rolls... The fourth point that they made... was that there are two distinct groups that need special approaches - the disabled and children. So the whole question of a national disability benefits program and a national children's benefits program grew out of SARC."

*The initiative to organize.* At the same time that the report was being written, there were actions initiated aimed at creating a coalition of anti-poverty organizations across Ontario. A New Democratic Party member of Provincial Parliament was engaged in helping to focus that coalition.

"OCAP grew in effect out of the initiatives of quite a number of people who had been involved in groups like MOMC ... all the anti-poverty groups in the Toronto area, and scattered around the province. They were there when the SARC committee began its work and then (an NDP politician)... began to draw together a broad reference group to relate to and to help promote the work of that committee both before and after its report. We effectively drew together the foreshadowing of the coalition. It was very much out of that group's work together that the Coalition as a formal body was organized to be the sponsoring agent for the anti-poverty marches to promote the SARC committee's report and its objectives."

At the same time, the Liberal members of parliament were encouraging the formation of a coalition that could speak on behalf of those who daily faced issues of poverty.

"A number of groups came to see (a politician) and indicated that we had to make some significant changes in our income assistance programs. They were concerned ... (not) just (about) financial help ..., (but) help in such things as day care, training programs, support programs from former spouses and things like that. And then of course, the dollar value of what they were receiving as a benefit. They made it very clear that they were very concerned about the impact that all of this was having on their children. Now there were a number of different groups around the province that came to see (a politician) individually. Over the next couple of years, they started to come together and realized as most interest groups and lobby groups that coordinating your efforts usually pays bigger dividends than trying to do it on your own. It's just that you have a much broader focus, and you cover more bases... A government... can't deal with 100 different groups with 100 different foci. You've got to get together and you've got to narrow it down... give (the government) something... that's realistic... When you meet with literally a hundred individual groups and they all want something to come at it a different way, you just can't do that. So, in some ways, I guess we were partially responsible for them coalescing, just simply saying to them: 'Look, that's the better way to go'."

While the SARC report was being prepared and the politicians were encouraging the formation of a provincial coalition, a group of organizations came together to form the March Against Poverty (MAP) Committee, in which Mothers and Others Making Change became involved. The president of MOMC, as noted above, had been receiving correspondence for Mothers Making Change and had contacted this organization.

"I remember our first meeting (about March Against Poverty) like it was yesterday!.. All the members of the Committee were there... They were working with the NDP, they were using ideas from the NDP... I think we were the sixth group to join... It came through a flyer and I called him up and he told me what it was about that all they do is they picket and they demonstrate... I was so impressed with (a member of March Against Poverty)... We went there and we listened and it was the same problems that we had except that all they did was demonstrate while we on the other hand were a self-help group at the same time. They couldn't believe the things we were doing!.. We joined them and then they joined us."

A member of OCAP described the initial stages of the formation of the March Against Poverty. The initial campaign was for a 25% increase in social assistance. This campaign served as an impetus for the formation of several anti-poverty groups.

"The roots of the thing probably go back... to the March Against Poverty Committee that MOMC also participated in which was a grouping of organizations in Southwestern Ontario who came together initially for a campaign for a 25% increase in social assistance... By the spring of '88, out of the poverty forums (held in various cities in Ontario), some groups had started to actually form... At that time, we were contacted by MOMC that had been going a relatively short period of time, I believe then... They joined the March Against Poverty Committee and we continued to work up until the three-pronged march when it was decided that the purpose of the March Against Poverty Committee had been successfully served. We had raised the issue of benefit adequacy, we'd contributed to the building of a larger movement, the time had come to actually found a provincial organization."

*Political lobbying.* Once again at about the same time, there was much political lobbying at the provincial level in support of the implementation of the SARC report. A Liberal politician remembers the work that was being done to change public opinion in support of the SARC report.

"I was out building coalitions among a whole lot of other groups. Like building coalitions in the business community, building coalitions in the retail and industrial community because I knew that public perceptions had to change before we were going to get support for this kind of thing. One of the reasons SARC was so successful was because of the work we did in building that base of support all across the province, and among just about every interest group you could talk to...among social agencies, municipal government people..."

The responsibility for the lobbying that was happening was also being placed on members of a coalition of social service people in the Toronto area who were very active in lobbying the business community as well.

"There were a range of people that were approaching the business community. I think there was the SARC's, there was an ongoing group out of that that was separate from the coalition, like (names), people who were leading figures in the social policy research council... in Toronto, were in that SARC network as such, in the social services community... They were the ones who undertook to persuade for example, Eggleton and Conrad Black and people like that to come on side. Now, there may well have been some approach from (members of the Liberal party) in the background to try to get some legitimacy for acting on the SARC initiative by getting the business community's support, I'm not privy to that, I don't know about that, but I do know very much that people like (names) in the SARC network group, carried on a lobby after the SARC report came in and were very active trying to get business backing at the same time as the coalition was trying to mobilize all the poverty groups and the activist organizations in the labour movement, in the churches, in the community at large in order to get a more broadly based coalition than the professional social service personnel within the SARC network."

At some point prior to the implementation of the first stage of SARC, public support was given to the report by the then mayor of Toronto, Art Eggleton and by a leading business figure, Conrad Black. Public support for the implementation of the report of the Social Assistance Review Committee was escalating.

*The planning of the three-pronged march - Campaign Against Poverty.* While this lobbying was occurring, the March Against Poverty committee (now the Campaign Against Poverty - CAP - Committee), was in the process of organizing a major march from three cities in Ontario to the steps of Queen's Park. This was undertaken with the assistance of members of the NDP. A member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) recalls the support the coalition received.

"There was undoubtedly a great deal of involvement by the NDP... There is no question that they put a great deal of resources in to the work, there was no question but that (an NDP Member of Provincial Parliament) really excelled himself and had an enormous commitment both in terms of pushing for it within his caucus, but in terms of actually participating in the thing and working to build it and, I must say, marching every step of the way... There is no question but that they did function as a key ally in that campaign. And we were certainly ready to receive the help of politicians who wanted to work seriously on the issue."



An NDP politician agrees with this assessment of the support that was offered by their members in terms of organization and facilitation.

"Effectively, the administration of the march and all of the facilitation that needed to be done around it, organizing the rally at Queen's Park, the reception rally and so on, came out of (an NDP) office. So, it was in that context of putting together the coalition and trying to reach out across Ontario, I think ultimately some 80 or 90 organizations in the coalition in total, that I was in touch with MOMC. There were many groups that put their shoulders to the wheel and made it a very effective protest."

The politicians in power at Queen's Park were hesitant about the need for the march. The members of CAP were asked to be cautious about what was said and about how the march itself proceeded.

"What (MPP's) wanted them (anti-poverty organizations) to do was to make sure their members and the public fully understood the issues... It was really with very, very mixed feelings that I heard they were going to do it (the march). And I sort of passed the word along that: 'I know you've got to do what you've got to do, but please keep this in mind.' So one of the things that they did do as they came to various places, they were a little bit more reserved in how they behaved and the sorts of things that they said which I was thankful for."

While the NDP and the members of the Campaign Against Poverty (CAP) committee were planning a major march across Ontario, local groups were preparing to meet the marchers in each community. MOMC was the organization in Kitchener responsible for organizing support for the march and for sponsoring a dinner in honour of the marchers. Many local social service agency representatives participated in this process.

"My involvement was that I was a participant in the organizing activities before the march and what I hope I did there was to provide some encouragement to other people to be involved in that and for Mothers and Others to be involved in that, as well as people within our own department to encourage a positive perception on the part of our department regarding the march... There was a series of meetings in advance of the March, held at St. Peter's Lutheran Church. Other agencies were represented. I guess it was mainly to get information back out to our agencies about what was happening that we were invited I think, but also I had hoped to be encouraging the group itself to go ahead with the idea... A representative of local union organizations and some church groups... were involved in organizing a dinner for the march assembly when it came through Kitchener... it was good to see a lot of local community people, some of whom it hadn't occurred to me ahead of time that I would see them there, but I was delighted to see them there, and it made sense to see them there and it was kind of a unifying community spirit to see a lot of people pitching in and being a part of that social movement."

A member of the Campaign Against Poverty (CAP) committee remembers the rally that was held in Kitchener. This person was impressed with the amount of support from the community.

"In conjunction with the Social Planning Council, they (MOMC) did a very, very good job of providing an excellent turn out, a good opportunity to confront the issues right there in the middle of town. As well as a real sort of morale lifting meal when we finished with the formal part of the day... it was very strong stuff!"

The reception is also remembered by the members of MOMC. The amount of community support that the members received in the organizing of the reception was evident in the response to it.

"We were part of the organizing from the very beginning... My involvement with the reception in Kitchener, making all those contacts and inviting people and explaining what was going on. I guess to see just the masses, I think that was in itself was an impact, just seeing all those people!"

"Oh, that was really wonderful! We had planned the reception for them as they came in to Kitchener, and we knew that there was only a short walk left from here to Toronto... We had quite the splash! We had people from all over, the welfare department, the churches, everywhere, come to hear (a member of CAP) talk about this and everybody joined in to help us. We got the food donated, and the church gave us the space and the media was involved and everybody put their hands in that thing! And it was a good feeling 'cause I mean, (politician) was standing there with us and other important people."

The marchers were well received in all of the communities through which they passed. People came out to support them and the reason behind the march. They received enough money from supporters to be able to organize a conference of anti-poverty groups.

"And people would honk as they drove by, they would give us money to get meals or whatever between towns. They would do anything because people didn't like what was happening to the poor! But they were in small towns where if they voiced their concerns, they could be looked on as troublemakers. So this way they could focus it on the group and there wasn't the personal backlash."

"I think people were aware because people supported it in every community... you could tell that by the number of supporting marchers that went from community to community. They didn't run out of money, there was enough money to carry the organization to the November conference (from donations during the march)."

Media coverage of the event was overwhelming. In almost every community, there were television cameras and newspaper reporters recording the event.

"I mean the Sudbury and the media in the north were simply every day following the marchers down from Sudbury. They'd send their crews out and they'd interview them at the end of every day! And they'd feed it back. In fact when we got to Parry Sound, even the CKCO out London way was sending people up to Parry Sound to interview the people on the Sudbury end of the march as well as the people coming through London. The Ottawa media were covering. The Toronto media didn't tend to pick up until rather late in the march itself, but it was obvious that there was a very massive coverage that was taking place and it wasn't until it was apparent that the marchers were being followed and being responded to community by community in quite a dramatic way, that you in fact got a decision (about the implementation of SARC)."

The reception in Kitchener could not compare to the emotions that were evoked in the members of MOMC at the culmination of the march at Queen's Park in Toronto on April 8, 1989. Two of the members interviewed were tearful as they remembered the emotions elicited by that rally. Another was excited even remembering it. It was a very emotional experience for the participants.

"It couldn't even compare with the feeling we had in Toronto! When they came marching in... There was (a marcher) with the soles out of his shoes and they had come so far - 251 miles. It was hard to believe the kind of people that were in there. When they came in, Arlene Mantle (a singer) was singing 'Solidarity Forever' and it was so sad! And there was so many people there. It was just like , it was like it was a huge, gigantic Mothers and Others Making Change! That's what it was like. It was like 'We're not going to take this any more' (the slogan of MOMC). That's what it was like and like those people getting up and talking for the first time in their lives at the picnic... It's exactly what it was like. Except there was so many, you were overwhelmed with the emotions, the emotions of everybody standing up and saying: 'No, we're not going to take this and we're doing something about this'. It was just a really good feeling to see people fighting back in a quiet way. With music and marching ... Sometimes I just get chills up my spine just thinking about it. It's too bad that it couldn't be done all the time or that it couldn't have been even more, they should have been lined up for miles, there should have been millions of people there because that's what this country is made of - poor people are the backbone of this country, we built this country!"

"We drove to Toronto and before the marchers got in, we were at the gate cheering them on. There was over 3,000 people at the gates at Queen's Park!!!! And that just blew us away because it was just wild! People were in tears, literally in tears and it was so emotionally charged that it was just great. Because it raised so much awareness."

"It was disbelief that we had that many people involved, that we could get that many people charged up enough to say I'm coming out of the safety of my house. I'm coming out to see what's happening, to participate. It was just phenomenal to hear cheering, to hear the support, to hear the truckers going by in tandem trucks blowing their air horns. Those type of things. It's an experience that you would never forget because even though you're participating in these groups, there are times that you feel sort of frustrated that the fight is there but you feel like you're fighting a hopeless battle. Every once in a while something like this comes along to recharge your battery and you just feel emotionally fulfilled."

The support for the implementation of the SARC report was overwhelming. It seemed that everyone supported its implementation. A Liberal politician recalled his feelings about the process.

"Although it was one of the toughest processes I was ever involved in, it was one of the most satisfying ones because you really got a sense all the way down the line no matter who you were working with, people wanted this to work, they wanted it to happen, and they felt that it was the thing that we ought to be doing. It was a good thing to be doing."

Time leading up to the three-pronged march was spent garnering much support across Ontario for the march itself and for the implementation of the SARC report. With the assistance of members of the NDP, the CAP committee was able to rally over 3000 people to the steps of Queen's Park. The march had smaller rallies in each community all of which served to rally more support. The media continually covered the march and again, support was growing. Enough money was raised to carry the CAP committee to the formation of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

*Formation of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.* The three-pronged march was the impetus to create a province-wide anti-poverty organization.

"So, following the three-pronged march, in the early part of 1989... we held some discussions among... different anti-poverty groups... Our goal has been to establish a coalition of local anti-poverty organizations... The thrust of the organization has been basically to try and mobilize poor people and their allies to demand change, to press for change, to do so on a non-partisan basis and to be ready to criticize whoever might be in power including, as has become an issue recently... the NDP. And that is basically what we set out to do and what we are proceeding to do."

The philosophy of OCAP is that the needs of the poor need to be put on the political agenda and that by joining together in a powerful, province-wide organization, that goal can become a reality. That philosophy emphasizes that the organization is non-partisan.

Time, resources, and money are issues for the Coalition as they are for any other group attempting to create change. Funding from government is out of the question once again because of the lobbying tactics employed by the organization.

"I think we need to recognize that business lobby groups have vast resources to go out there and make their points and they do so very loudly and effectively. If the poor are going to be organized, obviously they're not going to be able to fund the thing themselves....in terms of actually organizing the poor and unemployed in Ontario on the kind of scale we've thought about at the moment, it's obviously completely hopeless. I mean, there are people calling in here from across the province with all kinds of situations!"

As with any fledgling organization, there have been problems within the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. Mothers and Others Making Change and two other groups made a decision shortly following the founding conference that they no longer wished to be formally affiliated with OCAP. MOMC will, however, participate in any social actions with OCAP as long as they agree with the purpose of the demonstration/ lobby/ rally. The reasons for that division are complex. The first reason given was that it was organized mainly by paid professionals, not by the poor themselves. This, MOMC believes, is a conflict with what the organization is supposed to be.

"The founding conference... was supposed to be a provincial anti-poverty organization and every one of those people (organizers) were professional people paid double digit salaries to do the jobs that they were doing... They were the ones that organized the whole conference! They were the ones that presented all the stuff to the audience, whatever... If (those who live in poverty were) not organizing it... (they should) at least be there to lead the events that were happening, to be the chairpeople, the spokespersons, the vote counters, whatever, that's what I feel and when the poor people asked for representation, they were denied it."

There were also concerns expressed about the fact that the democratic process was not being followed, that important decisions were made before the founding conference, that decisions were being made before the delegates could vote on them and that there were actions that indicated that some people were more powerful and/or important than others.

"A lot of really important stuff that should have been decided by the members was left to them (the organizing committee). They put a whole business meeting in to one day when it should have had two days worth of discussion... I think if they... focused where the focus should be, on the people, I think it would be a worthwhile endeavour then... The organization would have to go back to the people. Too many decisions were made for the people and not by the people. I could see MOMC aligning with OCAP if that ever happened."

Other groups also expressed concern about unnecessary actions which had occurred during social actions organized by OCAP. This was the reason given for their departure from the Coalition.

This process was watched very carefully by an outside observer who is affiliated with the anti-poverty network in Ontario. The support is for MOMC's position.

"We (a provincial anti-poverty organization) have tried to support OCAP but I also have kept my ears very close to MOMC asking always: 'Are they members? Are they not members? Are they advisory? Are they not advisory?' I think it's interesting to me that MOMC was one of the first organizations to break away from OCAP, not in terms of purpose, but in terms of more authoritarian leadership. And I checked it out with some people in other organizations, since I'm on (a provincial anti-poverty organization) I wanted to really not only represent them... but also keep listening for what MOMC was saying... I have to listen to not only those social work church connections I also have to listen to the poor in my own community... I felt that MOMC pointed out some of the problems in the OCAP organization. They were the first ones to point them out. And I'm not sure of all of the ins and outs of that. I asked some fairly hard questions at the provincial... level... I found out here and then I went to our provincial organizations and asked some others who were connected with London or Hamilton and said: 'Hey, what's going on, why is this happening?'. So I try to stay in touch at two levels. On that one I think well, from my understanding is that MOMC never completely dropped out of OCAP, they just distanced themselves somewhat so that they weren't tied in a knot with OCAP, but they still kept in touch, made sure they were ready for rallies where they could support the rally, helped out in many many other ways. So I didn't see the complete withdrawal between MOMC and OCAP for which I was thankful, on the other hand, I think that they were trying to play a very careful game... take a very careful social action position, which is to keep the provincial organization in touch with the poor... I felt like MOMC was doing a good job of trying to work with OCAP so that the social welfare system for the province would change, and to use the strength of a provincial organization and yet, using a colloquial phrase, they just didn't completely 'jump into bed' with OCAP, when they had some serious problems with OCAP."

MOMC is viewed as an important ally to the members of OCAP; they would like MOMC to be a member of the Coalition. The actions and opinions of the members of MOMC are also being watched closely by other members of the province-wide anti-poverty network.

In some ways, it may be fortunate that the ties with OCAP are less strong at this point. Some members believe that so much of the energy from MOMC was going to actions initiated by OCAP that there was little left for the group itself.

"When we were in OCAP, it was very frustrating because we were trying to deal with our own issues and we had to take them and put them all aside and deal with the political issues. OCAP was turning us too political and it wasn't our style to be too political. We didn't have time for us, for MOMC. MOMC was becoming obsolete in that it was getting lost in the crowd. I'm glad that (we) pulled out so that we had time to deal with our issues."

"At times (OCAP) has put people's needs below the needs of the group and that can be a real problem. Because you lose the autonomy of the local group when you have to fight every two to three weeks on a national issue. So you sort of lose your local support. That's where our problem was, in that we were doing so much for OCAP that the groups themselves, the smaller groups would suffer."

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty was formed following the three-pronged march when support for the idea was available through the energy created for the march itself. Their goal is to create a powerful network of anti-poverty organizations across Ontario who would be able to work towards the goal of social justice and the end to hunger, homelessness and poverty in Ontario. Although MOMC was closely aligned with OCAP in the beginning, a rift now exists that is based on conflict regarding representation of those who live in poverty on the committee and about differences regarding the democratic process.

#### *The Walk a Mile in My Shoes Campaign*

During the course of the interviews, the participants were asked if they particularly remembered any campaigns in which MOMC was involved. Aside from the three-pronged march, there are two campaigns which those who were interviewed believe to be important. The first of these was the Walk a Mile in My Shoes rally. Members of anti-poverty groups across Ontario gathered at Queen's Park each with a pair of shoes. In each shoe was placed the "story" of that person.



"There were shoes brought from all over Ontario, with stories in them. All over Canada with stories in them. And they were the same type of stories no matter where you went. Some of these stories were taken right into council chambers and read right in council chambers which I thought was a major coup because we never got into the doors. But to know that at least we were that effective at the time was a big one... people of every walk of life were there, had sent in pairs of shoes. And what had happened, there was one gentleman there, and I'll never forget this as long as I live! He got up to the mike and he said: 'You know, my shoes should be in that pile too, the only problem is that this is the only pair I've got to wear. I can't go barefoot'."

As identified by the participant quoted above, the effect of this action was viewed by many of the participants as "good media". They thought that people would be able to identify with the protest and perhaps think about what the demonstrators were trying to say.

"That was good media!!.. that wasn't just a bunch of people yelling and screaming, there was sort of that little tag on with the shoes. It had a humorous element. People could sort of chuckle a bit and say: 'Yeah, I get the point.' I think that was creative. That was an effective way to demonstrate publicly... So, it made it stand out which made it effective... Effective in getting people to think. It may have been a five second thought but I think it was effective in getting people to say: 'What's that and why are all those shoes there'. And by saying: 'Why are all those shoes there?'. Somehow you have to focus in on the answer. They want other people to walk in their shoes. They don't understand what the situation is. Even if you don't understand what the cause is, you know that they are saying: 'Try being one of us for a while'. So I think that was effective. It didn't change policy but it was effective in getting people's attention and getting them to think."

The impact of this action was seen as raising people's awareness of the issues of poverty. However, a member of OCAP believes that this action also brought the activities of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty to the forefront.

"It I think had a very significant impact... it was really a very simple thing to pull together, it only required that people went out and beat the bushes in their own communities and got the support and gathered up the shoes and got the people to write the messages. I remember that we had speakers from pretty well every community that came down. I remember that as always, MOMC was able to do a pretty good job of pulling their people out. I think it made its point... it was visually very dramatic to do that. And also people were impressed, I know people here in Toronto were impressed. I mean a man gets up from Windsor, a woman gets up from Thunder Bay, there was that sort of sense of people coming in from everywhere. So, it certainly put us on the map."

The impact of the rally was to increase public awareness. However, the impact on the government in changing policy was minimal, if that.

"I think the media picked up on it and just put that thought back in people's head again, but I don't think the politicians acknowledged it at all. I don't think it made an impact in the house itself."

The participants in this research then, believe that the Walk a Mile in My Shoes campaign was effective in raising the awareness of the general public of issues of poverty and of the role of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. It did not affect social policy at all.

#### *The Election Campaign*

In the fall of 1990, a provincial election was held. The outcome of this election was a surprise to the people of Ontario and to the new majority government, the New Democratic Party. The expectation had not been that they would win a majority. There are those who believe that the campaign against the Liberal government that was launched by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty was in part the reason for the change in government. Both members of MOMC and local community members commented on this possibility.

"A change in government... was a collective action in the province of Ontario. Through OCAP organizing it and each community and the associations and that tried to make people sort of think about the actions and statements of (the current government). (The premier) wasn't very receptive. It defeated him, it was his undoing. People were able to see his attitude. Especially in Kitchener."

"I think that if it hadn't been for groups like MOMC and the Ontario Coalition, a lot of the SARC recommendations may have gotten very little attention, and it's hard, very hard to say in pure conjecture, but I do believe that it's groups like MOMC and the Ontario Coalition who had a large deal to contribute to the public awareness around the social needs in this province, which may have been a part of the change in political attitude, and may have helped bring about a change in government, and brought us the NDP party to power, with the kinds of changes that it's helping to bring in place."

The action during the election campaign was a coordinated effort of all of the anti-poverty groups affiliated with OCAP. They were able to confront the Liberal candidates at many places throughout Ontario.

"I believe that (OCAP) put a serious dent in their fortunes... (OCAP) actually encountered the Premier on 23 different occasions throughout the election campaign. Plus all kinds of different activities against Cabinet Ministers, members of their caucus, all candidates meetings... There wasn't a day that went by that somewhere, in one way or another, there weren't one and in most cases several... actions going on that were bringing out the issues of poverty and forcing them on to the agenda... It had a very, very powerful impact and it wasn't just that we contributed to a change of government, it was who was out there fighting back... NDP people would completely agree with what (OCAP was) advocating and say it was in line with their agenda for people and indeed it was... It was... a showing of (OCAP's) strength."

A Liberal politician was not impressed with the activities of the Coalition. In fact, this person believes that the members may have harmed the reputation of the Coalition in the long-term.

"During the last election, the number of groups who personally made personal attacks on the Premier were not very helpful. Not just because of his reaction but because of the reactions of other people who happened to be in those audiences... And I was in a number of locations with people and... as I stood back in the audience, I could hear other people saying... 'Who the hell do those guys think they are?' and if they were identified with future changes, I don't think it would have been very positive. I think if anything, they hurt themselves."

Again, there is a divergence of opinion about the effect of the actions of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty during the election campaign of 1990. Some believe it was a powerful showing of strength leading to the downfall of the Liberal government, others believe that the reputation of the Coalition was damaged in the long-term.

#### *Changes at the Provincial Level*

Throughout the interviews with members, local community members, politicians and members of OCAP, there were references to changes that may have occurred

because of the actions of OCAP in affiliation with groups such as MOMC. Several of those who were interviewed spoke of changes that they believe have occurred at the provincial level. These changes will be described followed by a presentation of the processes that were reported. It must be emphasized however, that there are many variables involved in the changes and processes and that it is almost impossible to understand exactly what happened. As one participant explained: "It's an inexact sort of science to try and point out exactly or to try and analyze exactly what was achieved. There are too many variables thrown in to the thing."

*Increased resources.* Following the march, when the provincial budget was announced, the first stage of the SARC report was implemented by the Liberal government. This meant that there were more services and resources available to the poor in Ontario. An immediate increase in social assistance payments was announced and some incentives to leave social assistance were implemented. A Liberal politician described these changes.

"The first section, the one we implemented, I think the figure was something like 415 million, basically did two things: it put more money into the hands of the people who were already on social assistance, stressing to a large extent the children that were involved. And secondly, it made the beginnings of turning the disincentives into incentives. Those are the two key elements of it... We (government) moved in a series of incentives versus disincentives. In other words, it is worth your while to work, even if it's part time. It is worth your while to go into a training program. You're going to be farther ahead."

There are certainly divergent and at times contradictory perspectives about the effect that the three-pronged march had on the implementation of the first stage of the Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee. There are those that insist that the impact of the march was the implementation of the report. One group of those with this opinion consist of members of MOMC.

"They implemented the first part of SARC, the SARC Report because of that march... I don't think if we hadn't have had that march and the publicity that went with that march the SARC Report would have been implemented at all. I mean how long did it sit there before they did anything? It was after that march that they finally did something."

"Up to that point he (MPP) had said: 'You are getting nothing'... and then because of the press coverage that we had, because of people's interest in, brought to the forefront, it had not only gained solidarity for the poor but supporters of the poor and groups like MOMC have the spearhead of that. So, it's a situation where you may feel like you've got a voice in the wilderness, but just by opening a few doors, you can hear a few other people with the same needs getting them met. And that makes a big difference."

"We know for a fact (changes were made because of the march) because (the Minister of Community and Social Services) admitted to the TV crews that he had no intention of making anything in the budget for people on Social Assistance and that march persuaded him to do something."

Members of OCAP were also of the belief that the march had an enormous impact on the implementation of the first stage of the SARC report. They believe that major changes were made in the government's stance following the outpouring of support for the marchers.

"It (the march) had an enormous impact on the thinking of the government. I think they were profoundly shaken by how significant the outpouring of support was... I mean when we got to Queen's Park, we had three and a half thousand people come out which is so far beyond anything that has been achieved before or since... In terms of its immediate impact on the government, I think that can't be underestimated... (OCAP's) sources within Queen's Park would lead (us) to believe that what they intended to do was put very much less into it than they actually did. I understand that after the march came through London... a quick meeting was called between the Premier's office and the Treasurer's office to discuss what ways the budget could be beefed up around the areas of social assistance... I mean, it wasn't that what we won out of it was devastating or devastatingly good, but when you're fighting at that level of people's survival, any hand hold you win is extremely important."

A member of the New Democratic party also has an opinion about the importance of the march for the implementation of SARC. This person notes that no concrete plans were announced until after the march took place.

"What I know is that it was obviously taking the Liberal government an awful long time to respond to the SARC proposals, and that (the Minister) kept saying: 'Oh, yes, that they would be responding, that they would be responding'." But months went by and still no decision, no response, there was nothing that was definitive or clear or demonstrable as I saw it at the point where we began the organization of the march. It was interesting that it was really at the point where the marches began to gain a lot of public following across the province... I am not privy to whether in fact (the Premier), (the Treasurer) and (the Minister of Community and Social Services), weeks in advance had said that at that point in time, in April, we will be making a decision and the public will know that we are supporting SARC. All that I know was that there was a very interesting conjuncture of events that suggested that the marches and the public support that they got, played a very significant role in the government's decision. I do know that (the Minister), when the house got back in session, shortly following the marches, thanked (an NDP MPP) personally for making a lot of it possible. So, I can only gauge that there was a very important role that was played. I wouldn't want to say that was the only role, because I know that the Minister himself was intent on seeing the reforms through. But I know... that is a very different thing than getting it done. From that point of view, I think the marches were highly significant."

Another point of view is expressed by a member of the Liberal Party who was interviewed. This person states that the march certainly served to increase public support of the changes involved in the implementation of the first stage of SARC but that the march did not affect the decision of the government to implement it.

"Groups like Mothers Making Change, Ontario Poverty Coalition definitely had an impact on that (public support) but not the key one, there was much more to it... Well, the decisions had been made before that march even started... that sort of solidified public support... It was just one more sign that, hey, this is serious. And the public support was important... The march itself did not change the final product. To the extent that it made the final product more saleable, more marketable if you will, with the public, is possible... All I can say was that the public acceptance of what we finally did was so overwhelmingly strong, that it probably had that effect. I mean, the media, the business community, social groups, municipal leaders, it was just almost unanimous! There was so little opposition to it!"

Some members of MOMC and of OCAP and an NDP politician give credit to the march for the implementation of the first stage of SARC. A Liberal politician agrees that the march may have increased public support but that it did not impact on the decision of the government.

Even though the members of OCAP are convinced that the march had a major impact on the decisions made by the government in power, there remains a question about the impact of the implementation of the first stage of SARC on those who live in poverty. Was it really a significant change?

"The STEP program (whereby social assistance recipients can continue to receive some benefits and still be eligible for social assistance), I doubt if that would have been in place but for the three-pronged march... it is true that more people on social assistance now are able to take work and receive income. It's gone up quite a lot but still you're into a situation where it's gone up from nine point something to 13 point something of recipients... it's significant but it's hardly fundamental change."

*Increased public awareness.* Many of those interviewed agree with the opinion of the Liberal politician that one of the major impacts of the march was the increase in public awareness of the problems involved in the present social assistance system. The members of MOMC in particular believe that there was a significant increase in the awareness of the general public about issues of poverty.

"The three-pronged march.. that to me was the absolute ultimate gathering of people sharing poverty and the marchers themselves doing that thing, marching to make a large statement that happened over a span of many days. It raised a lot of people's awareness to the situation. People to this day still talk about the march... I think there was a consciousness/ awareness throughout the general population of Ontario, if not Canada... The media gave good coverage, it was on the news every night where the marchers were. I guess a little bit of some of the reception in each community, the talks with the officials in the community. The media did a fine job of covering that event."

"It was a province-wide thing and... it gave awareness to people that it was not just a local problem, it was a problem that everybody shared in the province... It brought awareness to the problems... So you had to notice and if you were not aware before, you became aware then and say people are starting to demonstrate, people are starting to come out and speak against all these things. That may give strength to another. Even if it only made one person aware of the problems, it was still worth it and probably gave a lot of other people that had the same problems, the courage to come forth and speak up."

Community members also believe that there was an increase in public awareness following the three-pronged march. They mentioned the support of the NDP and the media coverage of the event as facilitating this awareness.

"That action, I felt that it was a very useful means to be making a good strong point about the needs for improvements to social assistance and promoting the recommendations of SARC and their implementation. I think it also created good public awareness of the issues and concerns and built a lot of support in the community and the impact of it I felt was very effective. When the March got to Toronto, Bob Rae was there to receive the group and make comments. There were lots of media there, reporting the event, making much larger numbers aware of what was going on."

Members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty also saw the march as an at least temporary way to increase public awareness. The march also contributed immensely to the creation of a network of anti-poverty organizations.

"It certainly reflected a great number of sort of middle class liberal sort of people were ready to, temporarily saw it as an issue and then once money was thrown into the thing - not very much! - they were ready to believe that their consciences had been relieved and they could back off again. In some ways it was a bit of a blip but in some ways its effect has stayed with us and certainly made an enormous contribution to the network."

However, the opinion of a local community member is that the impact of the march on public awareness was not nearly as great as was the impact of the support of the business community. This person believes the "pre-work" that was done through coalition-building and publicly stated support was more effective.

"If you were to compare the impact of the three-pronged march on implementing SARC to the announcements by Conrad Black, and the presidents of whatever bank it was - two corporate heads, my guess would be that there was more policy impact by the two heads of two Canadian corporations saying SARC has to be implemented than the marchers that marched all the way from the three points. My guess would also be that there was more public education involved in those who had given thought to the issue by Conrad Black and his compatriot than by the marchers because the people who need the educating are the people who read the business section of the paper. So in terms of effectiveness, it got media attention and probably educated some people but I don't think it was as effective as having the business community come out in favour of SARC."



As noted above, one result of some of the actions of the members of OCAP has been an increase in public awareness of the issues of poverty. One member of MOMC believes that perhaps that is all one can expect in the beginning.

"Eventually, you have to have real change. You can't just change things like that immediately when you want them but what you do about it is going to affect it somehow. It's going to make them talk anyways. That's all you got to expect at first."

There has been then, according to those who were interviewed, an increase in the awareness of the issues of poverty by the general public. Many believe that this was a result of the three-pronged march and the ensuing media coverage.

*Increase in power/influence.* One member of MOMC spoke about the power that was shown by the poor when the three-pronged march reached Toronto. This person believes in the strength of numbers.

"When they had that march from Windsor to Toronto, I went to Toronto for the picket outside of Queen's Park and I got to see what a lot of poor people banding together can do to the government. It was power... it was good knowing that the government had to listen, that was the big aspect... They got to see what a lot of poor people together can do... I got to see what big numbers can do compared to small numbers. Now I understand what Carole said: 'All of us gotta do this because the more of us that do it, the more powerful we are, and the better the chance they are going to listen to us'."

There are people who were interviewed who are of the opinion that the actions of the members of OCAP during the election campaign of 1990 contributed to a new party coming to power in Ontario. In addition to this, there is a belief that this power has continued. One member of the community, in particular, considers there was an increase in power.

"My sense would be, with this growing social movement, and growing awareness of issues of poverty, that the poor do have more power, they certainly have more say and more visibility. On the other hand, we're in the midst of a pretty awful recession and there's a lot more people feeling a lot more pain... In some ways though, that increases the broadness of the social movement, there's more people who have an understanding of what it's like to be without a job, to be without money."

This opinion was echoed by a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

This person believes that the anti-poverty movement in Ontario has political influence and has been in part, responsible for "holding the line" on welfare rates in Ontario.

"We were able to bring some weight in terms of the provincial anti-poverty movement into the fray, so to speak. That, I think, certainly made a difference... Relative to where we were, I think we made enormous gains. I certainly think that there isn't a member of the Ontario Legislature who wouldn't be aware of OCAP. I certainly think that if the NDP government is drawing up its budget, it thinks in terms of the anti-poverty movement and probably in some ways thinks of OCAP as the personification of the anti-poverty movement. As part of its calculations, it gives consideration to what we are going to say and what we are going to do... I think we do have influence, I think we do count when the decisions are made. That's gone very rapidly from a situation where the poor had virtually no influence to the level where if we don't actually have people dying in large numbers on the streets... The welfare rates are better in Ontario than anywhere else or not as bad as anywhere else maybe we should say. I think that is probably a testimony to the anti-poverty movement in Ontario."

*Increased accountability.* A minor increase in the accountability of welfare officials in Ontario was also mentioned by a member of OCAP. Although there is a belief that some changes may have been made, these are minor compared to those changes needed.

"It probably at least continued a process at least in the bigger centres of making welfare officials feel accountable... (but) we've barely begun to chip away the edges of it. It's still in essence a very, very basic and very, very punitive and brutal system."

*Formation of an ongoing anti-poverty movement in Ontario.*

A member of

OCAP believes that the largest impact was on the organization of an ongoing, provincial anti-poverty organization. As noted above, the march was a strong factor in the formation of the coalition.

"But the most lasting thing was the impetus to organize. People did really feel that they had achieved something really important, that it had to be continued and so we did get a situation where for the first time we could have a bit of coordination in the Southwest... We've got a situation where the people in Thunder Bay are in contact with people in Ottawa who are in contact with people in Sarnia. And not only in the sense that we are comparing notes but we are actually doing things in a coordinated fashion, actually sitting down on a regular basis and strategizing and planning. That's a profound change and I don't think there is any going back from that. I don't think that is going to change. I think that the political situation and the economic situation is deteriorating but I think the response of the poor in terms of being organized has taken a qualitative step forward. It's going to continue to go forward."

The changes reported by those who were interviewed at the provincial level include: an increase in resources available to the poor, an increase in public awareness, increased power/influence, increased accountability, and the formation of an ongoing network of anti-poverty groups.

*Process of Change at the Provincial Level*

*Multi-level initiatives.* Many of the changes documented above seem to be a direct result of the activities of the SARC committee, the politicians and the March Against Poverty committee in conjunction with groups such as MOMC. As documented above, this process entailed raising the awareness of the general public through education, lobbying, rallying, and political bargaining. These are the multi-level processes involved in change at the provincial level.

During the activities surrounding the release of the SARC report, many levels of society became committed to the process of the implementation of the first stage of the SARC report. The government, opposition politicians, the SARC committee, those

who were part of the process of SARC, the churches, and the March Against Poverty committee, all believed that the reform of the social assistance system was essential. Two members of the local social service community explained this necessary process.

"It seems to me you need to have two things going at the same time, one is that at the local level, or at the level where there are people who are suffering, you have to have ferment and you have to have an organization like MOMC that is really going to be watching what happens. At other levels, you need to have very sympathetic people who are going to say: 'Why is this going on?' And I think the best community action is where, MOMC and groups like churches or social workers or social planning councils or even like having the NDP government or the Liberal government... if (they) don't have the MOMC groups, (they're) dead in the water. Bureaucracy will not move. Nor will a guy like (the Premier). So what you need is, you need pushing and shoving from all over the system and my own feeling is that marches are effective if there are other people that are keeping the pressure on at other places in the system."

"They've put pressure, they've put pressure on the provincial or municipal, on the political leadership, government and political leadership. Sometimes it converts people to join this, to join the bandwagon. It certainly energizes the people who participate. I don't know, if you don't have something going on at the top, a march doesn't mean anything. But if you have something going on somewhere else in the system, a march can break loose everything."

Some of those who were interviewed believe that it is necessary for many levels of society to be involved in the process of change at the provincial level. One segment without the other is not likely to be as successful.

*Public education.* A Liberal politician also believes that many segments of society need to be involved to create an atmosphere conducive to change. This person views this as an educational process.

"First of all, everyone has to know what the problem is. Everyone has to know who, in fact, is on social assistance and why are they on social assistance, what are the alternatives? Everyone has to appreciate that it needs to be changed. Everyone has to have a sense of the validity of the proposed change you want to make. Now, all of that initially is an information program, just making the people understand. The second big thing is make them appreciate that given the competing interests in terms of the tax dollar... and making the case that this is a good way to use tax dollars in terms of the total social benefit. That is what SARC was all about. That's why we had to look and say: 'Who are we likely to get objection from? Who, historically, object to these sort of things, who historically seemed to have a misperception of what we are all about and why we are about it and who we are dealing with?'"

The changes described above involved many ways in which the public was educated about the issues of poverty. The input from the media, the one-to-one encounters through coalition building, and the three-pronged march and other rallies and demonstrations all served to educate the public about these issues

*Coalition building.* A politician believes that the next step is to build coalitions of this public support so that more education can occur. By banding together with others, understanding and education occurs.

"And let's try to be sure that those people fully understand what we are all about and start building a coalition, not only of information and knowledge, but a coalition of support... That is in fact what happened after those two and a half years! We had groups of people who prior to the SARC process, would have been very antagonistic and at the end of the SARC process, were writing letters to the Premier and were coming in and visiting the Premier and were visiting their MPP's local office and saying: 'Hey, you people, we want you to support this thing. We think this is the right thing to do.' Now, that was a fantastic turnaround... just by going out and making ourselves available and talking to them... 'When you explain to (people) who is on social assistance, how they got there, what their alternatives were, what your plans are to move from a disincentive program to an incentive program, that makes good business sense.' And we just turned them right around. And I mean it was no accident that a guy like Conrad Black would meet the mayor of the city of Toronto on the steps of city hall and say: 'I support SARC'... They would listen to their own people but that's part of coalition building... It's a case of going out and selling it and literally having the public come back and say we want you to do this... At the same time while (government) was doing that and other people were doing that, the (SARC) Commission itself of course was travelling around the province selling it, holding public meetings, meeting with key groups of people. So it was just coming at it from several different ways."

The coalition building again needs to be multi-level. It serves as a means of getting information to members and also as a source of support to the movement.

*Confrontation.* As at the community level, there were many opinions given about the use of confrontation. Some believe that this was necessary and useful. Others believe that consultation is the only feasible way of attaining a goal of change. This same division of opinion was present at the provincial level.

A member of OCAP believes that because of the contentious nature of the issues, that confrontation is inevitable. This person also asserts that this is a healthy approach to the controversy.

"I think you've really got to be prepared to recognize who the enemy is, name them and treat them accordingly. I mean, obviously there are people out there who are going to admire enormously what you are doing and respect it and be drawn to it... then there are people who are just going to be enraged and infuriated and incensed by what you do. Probably any organization that goes out there and fights for people who are branded as unclean, unacceptable, low income people, whatever, I think it's inevitable that you're going to be controversial and you're going to generate strong feelings. I think we do and I think it's healthy that we do."

A Liberal politician, however, recommends caution when dealing with public support. This person maintains that to initially gain attention through confrontative methods is important, but then you have to use consultation and education.

"(We) found them, once they did (form a coalition), a very forceful group, in some cases more forceful than was necessary. (We) had to caution them a number of times that you can do yourself harm as well as good. You can antagonize a lot of groups in society... They (MPP's) felt that they were really being harassed almost... If you're out there seen beating up on people, overly aggressive... you're not going to get any sympathy, you're not even going to get people to listen to you. They're just going to turn you off. So that was the biggest problem (we) had with them... On the one hand, the poverty coalition was an important organization, but on the other hand they sometimes created more problems for their own cause than what they helped... I'm not saying that some of these groups don't have to be very vocal, maybe in the first couple of stages make their presence felt... but a continuity of that approach, while it gets you attention, loses you support. So, once you've got their attention, you start working on them in a more realistic way... My experience is that most people are open to listen. Most people are just not informed... If you've got the right message, you can get out there and just talk to people, they are very supportive."

A member of the local social service community also believes that caution is important when engaging in social action. He/she considers that confrontation can lead to a loss of support.

"I guess I was a little bit pissed off at them because they had a Minister (of Community and Social Services) who probably cared more about issues affecting poor people than any Minister ever before and probably any Minister to come in the foreseeable future and here's a Minister who had to fight along with all the other Ministers in Cabinet for limited numbers of dollars and I'm not sure that demonstrating in front of his office didn't weaken his position in Cabinet because his Cabinet colleagues could then say: 'Well, you see (MPP), no matter what you did, they don't like you anyway'. So, I guess that I hoped that they could have recognized that they had an ally and that confrontation and name calling in front of your ally's headquarters doesn't strengthen your ally in campaigning for your needs."

A member of the New Democratic Party, however, views the actions of any group who is fighting poverty as acceptable. This person thinks that virtually any action by those who live in poverty is acceptable because the poor have been ignored for so long.

"I think it's very unfair to characterize any initiative by the poor in our society as being overly aggressive. The failure to respond to poverty begs a very, very big question in the conscience of Ontarians and its leadership and its elite groups. And I just would never characterize an initiative, regardless of virtually how aggressive it was, as being unwarranted in terms of effect. One might in terms of political niceties of debate as to what is effective, say that one thing is more politically effective than the other, but to bring down a charge on the initiators in the poverty communities, I'm not prepared to go along with that."

As at the local level, there is much disagreement about the use of social action as a means of addressing the issues of poverty. Some believe these actions lead to a loss of support and credibility, others view them as essential to creating change.

*Collaboration.* The participation of the NDP members in the three-pronged march and the cooperation among local community agencies in organizing a reception for the marchers, indicates some of the strength that can be gained from a consultative approach. Certainly during the three-pronged march, there was collaboration among different groups involved in the march.

One community member in particular views some of the actions of OCAP as unnecessary and firmly believes in the use of consultative methods. This individual believes that as much can be accomplished through this process.

"And there is nothing disgraceful about sitting down with the other party and saying let's see where we can go. Let's see what we can accomplish... There's a carry over feeling in some people in the social action movement... that if you are not yelling and screaming, if you're not condemning, then you're not an effective advocate. I guess I've been associated with organizations that have been effective advocates using a consultative methodology over the last 10 years."

The changes that those who were interviewed believe have occurred in the province of Ontario then are a result of multi-level initiatives, public education, coalition building at the provincial and local levels, confrontation and consultation.



*Potential at the Provincial Level*

Those who were interviewed saw many potential roles for the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and for groups such as MOMC. A member of OCAP believes that there is much potential for a powerful group to emerge that can influence government policy.

"It is possible to build in this province, a movement of the poor and the unemployed that is going to shame this province. I really do believe that while the governments are not going to view us with the same sort of warm glow in their eyes as they might have for the Chamber of Commerce, I certainly think that we can scare the hell out of them."

A member of the New Democratic Party also can see a role for anti-poverty groups but at the same time questions where they have been since the new government took over - they need to be there as the conscience for Ontario.

"At one point I think in the political life of the party, New Democrats were viewed as the conscience of the province. Well, no longer can they be the conscience of the province because now they are the establishment, they are the decision makers... no longer can we play the role of conscience for the province, now we've got to play the role as the government. So I mean there is that great gap there that really has to be filled by some organization or a group of organizations. Not only in social policy but all the other policy bills. And some groups have automatically kind of just slid in to that position. MOMC obviously hasn't. I mean I would encourage them to become affiliated with the party so that they could send delegates to the convention. So they can have people elected to the provincial council of the party, that governs the party. That's obviously a direct influence and obviously a very weighty influence with the government, on the provincial council regarding the services it wants. So yeah, I think sure, they should decide whether or not they want to play that role... Because you have a lot of talent there and you got what's probably more important than talent is ...they have some principles that they hold very close to their heart and they are not pretentious people, they are the salt of the earth. They really know what they believe in and so they got all this, you know they got their values, their principles."

This potential is being watched closely by some community members who are wondering about the affiliation between OCAP, MOMC and the NDP.

"MOMC we saw as being affiliated quite closely with NDP, and we were really curious to see (what would happen. The) NDP was making a number of promises in terms of how they would reform the social role, the relief system?.. And, so we were really curious when the election was held and NDP came in... because Carole was making statements like 'at last, they have government in power, and things were going to happen now' - major changes, changes that we were saying need to happen... It's interesting to see now that, now that everything that's happening at a social assistance level isn't quite like I think MOMC would like it... they're going to have some negative feedback to give, and it could very well be to the political party most closely affiliated."

Another community member believes that there is a need for the government to be pushed for changes regardless of the affiliation of the government in power. This person sees groups like OCAP and MOMC as being in a position to create the fervent necessary to push for change.

"Just because we're in a recession does not mean that MOMC shouldn't be making some statements because you know, how does Bob Rae and how do the people in his government push for social change, whether it's against the bureaucracy, or against business opposition, or against other things if they don't have some fervent saying: 'Why do we still have to live like this? Why haven't there been any changes?'. So it's important, even whether NDP, you can criticize NDP, but you're criticizing them from the left rather than from the right. I think it's important that there be some fervent, that there isn't enough going on."

There is much potential for a role for OCAP and MOMC to play in the political arena in Ontario. However, with a Federal election in the offing, perhaps the energy is going in the direction of commitment to issues at the national level.

"I should just mention the question of NAPO - the National Anti-Poverty Organization. Which while OCAP has not chosen as yet formally to join NAPO... there is, I think, developing a much more sophisticated sort of national network of organizations... The real enemy is in Ottawa and I think that even though we are a provincial organization, we have to look to make those national links and we have to be doing what we are doing here very much more in terms of tackling the Mulroney government."

Recommendations to develop national children's and disabled benefit programmes were made by the Social Assistance Review Committee. This would also require linkages at the national level. Those who were interviewed can see the potential

for groups such as OCAP and MOMC as they become more involved in the political realm of the province and of the country.

Those who were interviewed believe that there have been changes at the provincial level which include: increased public awareness of issues of poverty, increased power and influence, and increased accountability on the part of decision-makers at the provincial level. The processes for these changes include: multi-level initiatives, public education, coalition building, confrontation and collaboration. There is potential for the organizations to become more directly involved in the political process.

### Societal Level

Throughout the interviews with members of MOMC, community social service members, politicians and members of OCAP, mentions were made of other factors that have influenced the outcome and direction for both MOMC and for OCAP. These include the influence of timing, the recession, the backlash against social services, and national economic policy.

#### *Timing*

Many mentioned that the reason that the implementation of the first stage of the SARC report occurred was because the timing was right. A sampling of comments serves to outline these opinions.

"I don't think it was the action itself that brought some of the changes. I think a lot of the changes were already planned. It was the timing."

"They were very consistent with what a lot of other people were saying at about the same time."

"It just seemed to be that magic moment when a lot of people came together and said: 'Yeah, right thing to do!'"

"Their (OCAP's) success has been largely been because they have been able to meld in with what a lot of other people are doing."

A member of MOMC states that this aspect of timing was very difficult for her and helped to develop her patience. She believes that timing is critical when one is involved with creating change.

"...patience in waiting for the right time to do something. There's always a good time to do it and sometimes a bad time. Sometimes you have to be really patient for the right moment. I think that was the hardest thing for me (to learn). Sometimes I wanted action right then and there and when the puzzle wasn't quite complete, when we didn't have all the pieces in it, it wouldn't have been an appropriate time."

### *The Recession*

Many interviewed also made mention of the impact which the recession has had on the anti-poverty movement. This recession has been evident in Ontario since the fall of 1990, about the time that the New Democratic Party came to power. Those interviewed can see the difficulties facing the current government with this recession. A member of Provincial Parliament for the NDP states: "The economic reality is that this government has to deal with are... we have to deal with the economic realities."

A member of the local and provincial social service network and a former Liberal member of Provincial Parliament can both recognize the difficulties involved with the current recession.

"I think there's a bit of a mystique about the NDP government being in power, and I think that's part of it and that is hope. Back on Track is more off track than we wish it were. I mean like the government has not implemented as much of Transitions or Back on Track as many of us hoped they would. We're also in a recession, so the government has good reason."

"In a sense, we were very fortunate that we were able to (implement SARC) during good economic times despite the fact there were many, many other demands. At least the majority of the population did not feel personally threatened economically. To do the same thing today would probably be more difficult. There is no question about it. I noticed that in the last government budget they put about 200 million in (to social assistance). And my calculation was that it should have been another 400 or 500 million at this stage to be able to keep the process going. I don't think they could have got away with more. I don't think so. The terrible irony of it is that this is the time that it is needed most!"

One member of the community believes that the recessionary changes that are currently happening may eventually lead to changes for the system because of the current state of crisis in the province.

"Sometimes, I think change comes after a big crash. Like it does in our own personal lives... I think it will take something major to make major differences. And you might say that we're in a major thing that's happening right now, one of those major crashes. I mean, these are not usual times with the lay-offs and the plant closures and the recession. When we finally come out of this I would hope that we have learned some lessons and some different way of running our society or establishing society. It's certainly an opportunity, whether we take it or not."

#### *A Backlash Against Social Assistance*

Many of those interviewed mentioned an article written by a well-known columnist for the Toronto Sun, Diane Francis. In this article a comparison was made of those who survive on social assistance with those who earn \$45,000/year. She believes that they are in the same position. This article was an indication of some of the backlash that has been occurring against those on social assistance despite the fact that more and more people are being faced with the prospect of poverty due to lay-offs, plant closures and massive unemployment. There are, it seems, currently many who feel very threatened by the prospect of surviving on social assistance. Politicians and members of OCAP both indicated these concerns.

"During recessionary periods, that's (people against welfare) always the case... we human beings always scapegoat... if there is serious problems we look at whose responsible... it's 'them'. And you scapegoat against the people least able to defend themselves. Who is that? Immigrants, poor, on welfare... During a recessionary period, first of all the people who have lost their jobs are angry as blazes and they are looking for a target. But the people who haven't yet, who are very fearful... (scapegoat)."

"I think there has been a shift in attitude and I think it is unfortunate and it really goes the way of the economy. And of course, I don't know if you are aware of it, just recently, your question is very timely, Diane Francis of the Toronto Sun, wrote an article about not only the Back on Track report, but also, you know if you're not making 45 grand a year, then you're better off on GWA (General Welfare Assistance)."

### *Political Economic Policy*

A member of OCAP identifies these current developments against improving social assistance with a larger political agenda involving economic policy throughout North America. This person believes that there is a larger movement afoot to destroy the current system of support.

"It was inevitable that the Diane Francis articles would come up at some point, when you look at... a whole ideological onslaught that they're preparing, I think that as they deindustrialize Ontario because of their Free Trade agenda, I don't think that they are prepared to tolerate the welfare system. They are going to put so many people on social assistance that they're not even prepared to tolerate the kind of benefit levels that exist at the moment which can't keep people out of the food banks. You know, Diane Francis makes clear that a family of four being able to make more on welfare than they could on the minimum wage is unconscionable as far as she is concerned... That's what they're after. I mean, that's what we're up against and when we're seeing that... all across this province you're getting situations where because of the two-tier welfare system, municipalities are looking to cut back, cutbacks certainly in welfare through the discretionary powers."

Consideration was given by those who were interviewed to some factors at the societal level. These factors include timing, the recession, the backlash against social assistance which often occurs during recessionary times and the larger political, economic agenda for North America.

**Summary: MOMC Within A Larger Societal Context**

Mothers and Others Making Change is an organization which has very little structure. Although there is a management committee which operates in an advisory capacity, all decisions are made by the members of the group. Over the past two years, there has been an increase in the resources available to the group - they now have an information and resource centre and access to some food - and there has been an increase in the credibility of the group as well as in the community's awareness of the organization.

Generally, the impressions that have been conveyed in the press are the ones that the community sees as being what MOMC is. Community members generally view MOMC as a social action organization, but few recognized the self-help and education aspects of the group. Most community members see a role for the members of MOMC in the planning and delivery of services and in aligning with the New Democratic Party and thus influencing policy at the provincial level. Some of the cooperative roles suggested however, were contingent on obtaining registered status - which the group considers to be a conflict of interest.

The organization, from its inception has had ties to the local community. They are often asked for their opinion both by service agencies and by the media. They are represented on many community boards and have been involved in supporting local political candidates at both the provincial and federal levels. They have many linkages to the wider community.

Those interviewed believe that there have been changes in the community as a result of the actions of MOMC. There has been an increase in the accessibility of food hampers to those on social assistance because of the decrease in the justification process necessary to obtain one. There is some disagreement about the significance of this

change but most agree that at least the approach is more humane. Whether as part of a larger social movement or as a result of increased attention to the issues and image of those who live in poverty, there is also a consensus among those interviewed that there has been an increase in public awareness of poverty issues. In addition, there is an increase in accountability of the staff and decision-makers of local social service organizations. Most see this as being related to the fact that there is a "watch-dog" group monitoring the actions and decisions of social service agencies.

There is some consensus among those interviewed about how these changes have occurred. Through political lobbying, confrontation, collaboration, advocacy activities, and public education, the community is aware that there is an organization "out there watching" what happens to those who live in poverty.

The members of the community who were interviewed have some concerns about the style and representativeness of the president of MOMC. This is viewed differently by the members of the group. Suggestions made by community members include the increased sharing of the workload by the members of MOMC and the president and vice-president, that they become more organized in order to do so, that they clearly set and discuss long-term goals, and that they somehow obtain money to hire an organizer and pay rent for the support and information centre.

The members of MOMC have many connections with provincial and national organizations who are addressing issues of poverty. They have input into reports, politics, social activist movements, tenancy issues and legal issues.

During the time that the Social Assistance Review Committee was preparing its report, organizers were busy establishing anti-poverty groups across Ontario and politicians were building coalitions as were members of the SARC network in Toronto. Through this organizing, and with the assistance of members of the NDP, the Campaign Against Poverty (CAP) committee was able to rally over 3,000 people to the steps of



Queen's Park. The march had smaller rallies in each community all of which served to rally more support. The media continually covered the march. Support grew quickly for changes to the social assistance system. Enough money was raised to carry the CAP committee to the formation of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. As well, the first stage of the SARC report was implemented.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty was formed following the three-pronged march when support for the idea was available through the energy created for the march itself. Although MOMC was closely aligned with OCAP in the beginning, a rift now exists that is based on conflict regarding representation of those who live in poverty on the committee and about differences regarding the democratic process.

The research participants acknowledged changes at the provincial level as a result of the three-pronged march and other initiatives. These include: an increase in resources available to the poor (in particular the implementation of the first stage of the SARC report), an increase in public awareness, an increase in power and influence among the poor, increased accountability, and an impetus to organize on a province-wide basis.

The changes that those who were interviewed believe have occurred in the province of Ontario are a result of multi-level initiatives, public education, coalition building at the provincial and local levels, confrontation and consultation. They can see the potential for groups such as OCAP and MOMC as they become more involved in the political realm of the province and of the country. Consideration was also given by those who were interviewed to some factors at the societal level. These factors include timing, the recession, the backlash against social assistance which often occurs during recessionary times and the larger political, economic agenda for Canada.

This completes the results section of this thesis. At this point, some discussion of the results for MOMC in a larger societal context will be presented following which conclusions will be offered.

## **DISCUSSION - MOMC IN THE LARGER CONTEXT**

The results of the research at this level of analysis were much more difficult to evaluate. There was so much activity in the province by various organizations and levels of society that to conclude that the results were simply a result of the actions of either OCAP or MOMC would not be credible. However, the results do indicate that there are perceptions about how those changes identified by the research participants may have occurred. This discussion will focus then on the perceptions of the participants.

As illustrated in the previous discussion section, this thesis has two foci. The first is as action research on behalf of the members of Mothers and Others Making Change. The other is to examine the current state of theory as it relates to this research. Once again, the discussion will be presented according to these two foci.

### **Discussion of Results as Action Research**

The goal of the members of Mothers and Others Making Change, in collaborating on this research, has been to answer the basic question "Are we making change?". The results of this research indicate that all of the processes identified by the group are present and that some of the outcomes have been achieved. A slightly different model could be proposed for the processes and the outcomes that have been revealed through this research. This model is outlined on the following table (Table 3).

**TABLE 3 - RESULTS OF ACTION RESEARCH**

PROCESS	OUTCOME
<b><u>ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-networking	-creation of a support and information centre
-applying for grants	-increased credibility
-no structure	-maintenance of the group
-communication	-"voice" for the poor (media)
	-funding received
<b><u>COMMUNITY LEVEL</u></b>	
-political lobbying	-increased access to food hampers
-confrontation	-increased public awareness
-advocacy	-increased accountability of social service agencies
-public education	
-collaboration	
<b><u>PROVINCIAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-political lobbying	-increased public awareness
-public education	-increased power and influence
-coalition building	-increased money and resources (SARC implementation)
-confrontation	-ongoing networking
-collaboration	
-participation in task force reviews	
<b><u>SOCIETAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-awareness of timing	-actions are planned with consideration to timing

There are then four levels to be reviewed as these results relates to MOMC - the organizational, community, provincial and societal levels.

#### *Organizational Level*

At the organizational level, through networking in the community, through receiving some funding, through offering a safe place with little or no structure and through communicating with peers, the community and the media, the group has

achieved most of their goals at this level. They have succeeded in creating a support and information centre "The Voice of the People"; they have received some further funding from PLURA; they have increased their credibility in the community; and they are frequently contacted for comments with regard to poverty issues by the local media.

As was noted above, the results of this research were fed back to the members of MOMC at a series of weekly meetings. The results were discussed and further issues were addressed. One of the main problems that emerged at this level was the lack of funding for an ongoing and secure organization. Although present funding from PLURA is maintaining the organization, there is constant fear that funding will end (which it is likely to at the end of April, 1992) and that the group will no longer be able to function. The group noted a need for a brainstorming session regarding funding. However, before this could happen, on the suggestion of a member and the incentive of a few, a decision has been made to implement a social club every Saturday night as a place for the members to socialize at a reasonable cost and as an ongoing source of funding. The group does not need much. Enough funding to cover the rental costs, transportation costs, cost of a newsletter, supplies and postage, and coffee would assist the organization greatly. They have not at this point even considered hiring a paid organizer. This may, as pointed out, destroy the self-help aspect of the group.

The other issue at this level that was addressed was the problem identified in the community that there is not a sharing of tasks. Although this is a perception from the community, there are some internal issues that need to be addressed with regard to this. There has been an improvement in how many members participate in clean-up after the meeting. The intentions of the group members certainly are to help as much as possible but quite often other commitments and blockages occur. For example, during the course of the discussion regarding the publication of a newsletter, one woman with experience in doing "layouts" volunteered her services to put together a newsletter. However,

shortly after this, the woman had difficulties with her pregnancy and was unable to follow through. Many blockages to full participation happen. This is not a problem only of this group but of any volunteer organization.

Discussion also occurred regarding how members could continue to receive factual information regarding current and ongoing issues. Suggestions were made for guest speakers to attend the meetings on a regular basis, something that has declined in recent months.

Another issue that was identified by the members of MOMC was some difficulties in communication among members. Although a suggestion was made that a phone committee be established, this has not been followed through as yet.

The members of MOMC have been given feedback from this research and have followed through on many of the suggestions. There are blockages to issues with funding - the need for a Registered Charitable number. There are blockages to using the centre for other purposes - obtaining insurance, regulations regarding the use of the space. There are personal blockages to full participation of some members in the functioning of the group. These issues have been identified and discussed by the group and some solutions have been suggested.

### *Community Level*

At the community level, there has also been some success. The group has succeeded in increasing public awareness of poverty issues; they have achieved increased access to food hampers; and they are viewed as a "watch-dog" group by local social service agencies, thus increasing the accountability of those organizations. This has been achieved through a process of political lobbying, confrontation, consultation, advocacy and public education.

The members of the group were most concerned that their image in the community focused on the social action component of their group. They felt very strongly that the community should be made aware of the strength of the self-help component. As indicated above, they plan to publish a newsletter with information about their group included and would like to produce a videotape as well. Funding and resources have, to date, blocked the progress of this goal. The group members plan to initiate this process in the near future.

Because of the lack of controversy and therefore media attention, and because people within organizations like to take the credit for any change, collaborative efforts within the community are not often noticed. The members of MOMC recognize a need to have their collaborative efforts acknowledged in the community. Once again, this would happen through publication of collaborative efforts in the local media and through a newsletter and videotape.

During the course of the discussion, further problems regarding the food bank emerged. The question was posed: "How do we let people know we need nutritious food?". A suggestion regarding the publication of a pamphlet for the food drive was presented and noted. However, the same blockages apply: a lack of money and resources. The members would also like those who are in need of assistance to be allowed some choice in the selection of food appropriate for their own family. This would be accomplished by allowing people direct access to the food. A suggestion to make this option known to the food bank was made and again, noted.

The group members were pleased that they knew what their rights were and were empowered to stand up for their rights. However, concern was expressed about those on social assistance and/or living below the poverty level who were unaware of their rights. The question was posed: "How do we let others know what their rights are?". Again a suggestion of publishing a newsletter would address this in part. As well,

15008 COUNTY ROAD 5 BURNSVILLE, MN 55337 USA  
TEL 612 435 7587 FAX 612 435 7687 Tlx 5106006488



pamphlets about MOMC are already available for distribution to agencies and have been updated recently.

The other issue raised by the members involved the potential support available from the community. "What can community agencies do for us?" Again, the newsletter is an important source of information for the community.

The members are pleased that the changes that have happened at the community level are there. They do, however, question whether "real" change has occurred. Because of roadblocks, such as a lack of financial and other resources and because of the resistance to change that is evident, more changes are difficult to achieve. MOMC has started a process of change and the members recognize the need to pursue the avenues open to them to create "real" change.

#### *Provincial Level*

At the provincial level, through affiliation with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, changes have been made as well. The most important of these is the fact that there is an ongoing coalition of anti-poverty groups in Ontario. In addition, these groups appear to have some power and influence and increased resources and money (through donations, because of the implementation of the first stage of the SARC report and because of the fact that there is now a paid organizer for the coalition). There is also consensus about the fact that there is an increased public awareness that the organization exists and about the issues of poverty. These goals were achieved through political lobbying, confrontation (rallies, demonstrations, marches), through public education via the media, through coalition building and through consultation with other groups.

In discussion with the members, there has always been some discouragement expressed about whether or not there have been any "real" changes made at the

provincial level. Some members can identify that there have been changes but that these are mostly in the area of public awareness. Concrete changes, changes in policy have been minimal. Encouragement was given that this was not surprising because of the resistance received but to give up the "fight" would also not be useful.

Some discussion also took place regarding the role that MOMC wishes to play in the future, both provincially and nationally. This issue was not discussed at length. At the individual level, the members recognized a need to document the history of MOMC. Until this process is complete and the entire membership is aware of the history of the affiliation, little progress can be made on decision-making regarding this. At present, the group continues to be affiliated with OCAP during lobbies, rallies and demonstrations.

#### *Societal Level*

The group has little control over issues at the societal level. However, these issues were presented to the group for consideration. It was identified that perhaps the timing at the moment is not conducive to massive changes in social assistance system but that this does not imply that there does not need to be a level of awareness and a consideration of timing when planning social actions.

The questions posed by this research then include:

*Has Mothers and Others Making Change been an empowered organization?*

- were there changes in the structure of social power related to the actions of the members and/or their affiliation with other organizations?
- is future mobilization possible because of the creation of a collective consciousness?
- have they been able to make changes within the community in public awareness, political alignments, and physical, social and economic conditions in the community?
- what was it about the organization and/or actions of the group that lead to this successful/ unsuccessful outcome?

The answers to these questions have been evaluated. The results indicate that there is the beginning of a process for changes in social power because of the increased

public awareness. There have been political alignments made and lost. There have been minor changes in the resources available to the people - through implementation of the first stage of the Social Assistance Review Committee report, through the creation of a provincial anti-poverty coalition and more locally through the acquisition of a support and information centre. Future mobilization is possible because of not only the creation of a collective consciousness (as noted at the individual level) but also because of a structure (OCAP) that has been developed to allow for that future mobilization. The actions that facilitated these changes include: political lobbying, confrontation, collaboration, networking, advocating, communicating, and educating.

It is important to note that these changes did not occur solely as a result of the actions of MOMC. Other factors were significant, such as a level of openness by some community agencies and the fact that there was not a recession at the time of the activity around the SARC report. However, it is the belief of those who were interviewed that groups such as MOMC and the provincial coalition are, in part, responsible for the increase in public awareness and thus for some of the changes. The groundwork has been done; anti-poverty groups are forming; there is potential to create change at the community, provincial and national level. Despite enormous obstacles (mainly financial) some change has occurred. This is mostly in the area of raised consciousness, but it is a start.

An overall model of the processes and outcomes of the activities of MOMC would be presented as in the table below (Table 4).

**TABLE 4 - PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN MOMC**

<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>OUTCOME</b>
<b><u>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-has role models available	-gains information about rights/resources
-favourably appraises own situation	-believes in self as valuable person
-opportunity to help others	-feels accepted/equal
-is listened to by peers	-gains social support (tangible/intangible)
-shares stories and experiences	-hopeful about the future
-shares problems and solutions	-gains self-esteem
-has fun/celebrates	-gains energy
-acts collectively to	-contributes to organization and/or community
-have opinion heard	-blames external causes for problems
	-gains control over and takes responsibility for own life
<b><u>ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-networking	-creation of a support/information centre
-applying for grants	-increased credibility
-no structure	-maintenance of the group
-communication	-"voice" for the poor (media)
	-funding received
<b><u>COMMUNITY LEVEL</u></b>	
-political lobbying	-increased access to food hampers
-confrontation	-increased public awareness
-advocacy	-increased accountability of social service agencies
-collaboration	
-public education	
<b><u>PROVINCIAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-political lobbying	-increased public awareness
-public education	-increased power/influence
-coalition building	-increased money and resources (SARC implementation)
-collaboration	-ongoing networking
-confrontation	
-participation in task force reviews	
<b><u>SOCIETAL LEVEL</u></b>	
-awareness of timing	-actions are planned with consideration to timing

This then is what MOMC is. Interaction with all levels indicate that MOMC is empowering to the members. The question regarding whether or not MOMC is an empowered organization is much more difficult to answer. There is indication that there may be some processes at work that are beginning to enable MOMC to become an empowered organization. However, there are many roadblocks to this process and much work ahead for the organization. Much depends on the variable one could call "timing" - when the timing is right, the organization is potentially very empowered.

### The Theoretical Discussion

A discussion of the role of Mothers and Others Making Change in the context of the larger society would not be complete without the inclusion of how theory in community psychology relates to the results of this research. Therefore, a discussion of how this research confirms, disproves and/or expands upon the current state of theory follows.

#### *Organizational Variables*

*Situational focus.* MOMC has little structure, and voluntary leadership and membership. The prevalent values within the group include the acceptance of all members as equal and the placing of blame outside of the self. The group's goals include changing structures so that the situations of those who live in poverty are also changed. As Herman (1983) suggests, organizations which focus on changing situations as opposed to changing people increase the "instances of personal impact and of more important impact" (p.366). The focus of the members of MOMC is on changing their *situation*, as opposed to changing themselves. This view of successful organizations for the poor supports what the results of this research indicate: that MOMC enables members to

participate in social action and community development. The philosophy of the group may contribute to that potential.

This view that programmes aimed at changing situations are more successful than those aimed at changing people has important implications for those social programmes available to those who live in poverty. It is interesting to note that organizations that focus on changing situations appear to be more successful in changing individuals than in changing situations (i.e. increased self esteem, sense of belonging etc.). Further research regarding the philosophy and values of programmes geared to the needs of the poor, relative to their success, would make an interesting research topic.

The attitudes of those interviewed toward MOMC are divergent, as discussed above. Although most community members indicated that the role for groups such as MOMC was important, many believe that their strategies and tactics are unnecessary. The understanding that the professionals displayed for the experiences of the members of the group that led to their anger was not evident in their evaluation of the tactics used by the members of MOMC. This is understandable in that the distance that most professionals have from the experience of poverty is great. For this reason, further research regarding the attitudes of professionals toward the needs of those who live in poverty (based on either a victim-blaming or situation-blaming attitude) and ways in which they can become more responsive to those needs would be a productive research investigation and could potentially greatly influence the education and practice of professionals. This also implies a possible need for re-education of professionals regarding the causes and consequences of poverty.

*Professional collaboration.* The group Mothers Making Change which existed prior to the formation of Mothers and Others Making Change was initiated by

professionals and organized by students. The members of MOMC do not want professional involvement in their organization. They often, as is common in self-help groups, are distrustful of their involvement. As noted above, usually when a self-help group is initiated by a professional, it remains focused by professionals. This is not true in the case of MOMC. The factors that allowed this group to become autonomous could relate to several factors including the timing of the initiative by the president and the way in which the founding picnic was organized.

The focus has shifted from a group initiated and led by professionals to one that is willing to collaborate and seeks this collaboration but remains autonomous in its decision-making. The collaborative model proposed by several authors (Cherniss & Cherniss, 1987; Gartner & Riessman, 1984; Hurley, 1988; Lavoie, 1984; Mowrer, 1984; Wollert, Knight & Levy, 1984) appears to be functioning well within MOMC. The members are able to call upon the expertise of professionals whenever necessary and also share their own expertise with the community. In most cases, there is a mutual respect with those professionals with whom the group is aligned. Cherniss and Cherniss (1987) noted that the success of a self-help group was associated with this collaboration with professionals. Part of the success of the organization can probably be attributed to this collaborative process.

If one were to view this organization from a feminist perspective, the strengths of the organization become evident. The lack of formal structure, the equality of the members, the resistance to hierarchical structures, the collaborative, consensus building, and educational processes that are followed, all imply a feminist philosophy and orientation. The members of MOMC do not see themselves as a "feminist" organization. They prefer to define themselves as "humanists". Perhaps the rest of us have much to learn by studying how successfully this nonhierarchical organization can function.

The members of the group have engaged in public speaking to groups of professional students and at conferences aimed at professional audiences. This process for changing the views and attitudes of professionals toward self-help groups is a positive route for change. Meissen et al. (1991) in their assessment of the attitudes of graduate students toward self-help groups concluded that:

"Beliefs and attitudes do change. Feedback about the objects of belief, as well as new experiences and information can modify both beliefs and attitudes, and subsequently, intentions and behaviour' (p. 701).

The process of educating professionals to the needs and views of the poor has allowed for a mutual relationship to emerge. The members of the group are seen as valuable resources within the community as are the professionals viewed as important by the members. This mutual relationship may also have contributed to the success of the organization.

Through mutual experience and the sharing of information, it is possible to develop positive relationships between self-help members and professionals. This process would be very interesting to study further. An investigation of the successful interaction of professionals with self-help group members may serve to identify those positive factors which enable this relationship to develop and allow for more sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise between members and professionals.

*Leadership.* As has been discussed above, the leaders of MOMC, Carole and Jenny, complement each others' skills. Carole is seen very much as a charismatic leader - she is the initial contact person for new members and is much involved in advocating and supporting the members. Jennifer's role is much less visible. She obtains resources, shares her knowledge, networks with other community organizations and helps to maintain the functioning of the group. This is not to say that each of these leaders is



not involved in the same activities as the other. The roles are interchangeable, but the primary roles are those of leader and organizer.

There are, without question, tensions and conflicts within the group regarding the leadership positions and the distribution of power within the group. One of the drawbacks of the role of participant/observer is that there is a commitment to the maintenance of the confidentiality of those who are members of the group. For this reason, the conflicts that have been evident and which are often highly personal, will not be discussed here.

The roles of these two women are almost divided into community development and social action roles. This is extremely important for the organization because as O'Neill and Trickett (1982) and Alinsky (1971) explain, social action may create enough power to engage in negotiation. Skills in both negotiation and social action are essential for MOMC.

Jenkins (1984) emphasizes the need for both an organizer and a "natural" leader to be part of a social movement. The styles of the two leaders of MOMC can probably be seen as being those of leader and organizer. This allows for many and varied resources for the group members - support, consultation, advocacy, confrontation. This availability of so many resources within the leadership roles may also contribute to the success of the organization.

Heller et al. (1984) emphasize that in an antibureaucratic collective, when the charismatic leader leaves, there is often a move to bureaucratization (p.310). Although many who were interviewed believe that the group would survive a change in leadership, the probability of it becoming more bureaucratic is high. The balance of leadership is an important component of MOMC. Further, the leadership strivings that contributed to the dissolution of the social activism of the National Welfare Rights Organization (Piven & Cloward, 1977) are important to avoid in a collective. Through

this avenue of shared leadership/organizing, it is hopeful that this fate can be avoided by MOMC.

The review of leadership styles relative to group functioning and success has been under investigation. More research in this area may be interesting. However, it would be important not to interfere with "what works and what doesn't" in any given situation. The results of this type of research would be valuable as a predictive tool as to the success of a particular undertaking and may have implications for the hiring of staff. However, a group that is functioning well may not be able to benefit from such research; some caution is essential.

*Resources within the group.* The lack of funding within the organization is a very real concern for the group. Without funds to maintain the centre and allow for transportation, the group is chronically in danger of folding. Some theory can help to put this particular issue into focus. Heller et al. (1984) discuss the implications of funding.

"Lack of resources... is not a barrier during the founding phases of a grass roots alternative setting... Resources become important in the second phase, when the major issue becomes the maintenance rather than the creation of the setting... (However), with the influx of outside support... come new demands on the organization... such as... accountability." (p. 310).

This is the dilemma for the membership of MOMC. They wish to remain autonomous but also are in need of financial resources. Funding, however, may interfere with the functioning of the group as accountability increases and requests for bureaucratization become necessary to account for the spending that has occurred. There are positives and negatives to both views. The question remains: Would funding by outside sources interfere too much with the functioning of the group and force it to become bureaucratic? Perhaps a solution to this problem would be the creation of a source of

funding specifically for antibureaucratic collectives. However, the question of accountability would need to be addressed. It is hopeful that the present initiative to become self-funding through the creation of a coffee house will resolve this dilemma for this group. However, further research regarding the encouragement of self-help and social action groups who are serving an important function needs to be addressed through research of viable alternatives.

The allocation of funding for staffing for the group is also an issue that has not been resolved. Staff funding may interfere with the natural processes of the group as a self-help organization.

"The mutual aid/self-help role is nonhierarchical since both parties are peers facing the same problem, receiving from/giving to the other. The social context is a voluntary association without money mediating the relationship" (Borkman, 1991, p.644).

Obtaining a staff person could potentially interfere with the nonhierarchical, voluntary relationships which are evident within the group. Once again there appears to be a conflict as to the solution to this issue. The members of the group who devote all of their time to the organization should in some way be compensated for that time. This may interfere greatly with the relationships within the group though. The solution may lie in having enough funds available for extra expenses (such as driving) which these volunteers incur.

The fact that every member of MOMC is essential to the organization is indisputable. As in most settings that are "undermanned" (sic), the contributions of each member are needed and the members feel this need. "Undermanning generates pressure on its inhabitants to keep the setting going, and in response the occupants take up a wider range of tasks, encourage others to participate, and become more involved in the setting" (Barker & Gump, 1964, cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 124). However, as noted by community members and by some group members, some participants contribute to the organization at a different level than others do. As discussed in the review of the

literature, this could be related to the cost/benefit ratio for those who do participate (Knoke, 1988; Prestby et al., 1990). On the other hand, participation may be a reflection of the norm of acceptance within the group.

"Even though an organization may claim that everyone is equal, individuals differ with regard to their expertise, personal attractiveness, verbal skills, self-confidence, access to information, and interest in the task at hand. These personal differences lead to differences in the contributions individuals are able to make to the group, which in turn, lead to differential influence on the group. In some cases, the key to a group's success is its acceptance of member inequality" (Heller et al., 1984, p.314).

Perhaps the acceptance of every person as valuable is a key factor in the understanding of participation in groups. Perhaps this acceptance is part of the reason that MOMC has been able to function as an empowered organization. There is an emphasis on acceptance within the group, despite some frustration on the part of those whose commitment of time and energy to the group is intense.

Much research has been completed regarding a means to encourage participation - a problem encountered by most voluntary organizations (Prestby et al., 1990). The key dilemma of mass-based, permanent organizing theory is "how to sustain continuing participation in the absence of continuing inducements to participation" (Piven & Cloward, 1977, p. 287). Research focusing on the acceptance of the inequalities of each member rather than on costs and benefits could yield some interesting results to this key question. Is this acceptance of inequalities an important factor in the participation of individuals in an organization?

As noted above, Mothers and Others Making Change can also be viewed as an antibureaucratic collective. Success for such organizations is predicted if their functioning includes: equally distributed skills and knowledge, small size, financial dependence on members, regular and sanctioned self and mutual criticism, efficient responses to external demands, participation that is expected and valued over organizational efficiency, interpersonal rewards as incentive to participate, and

networks of friendship, expertise, and support that do not overlap, preventing the centralization of informal sources of power (Riger, 1984, cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 311). The members of MOMC have indicated that most of these factors are present within their organization. Skills and knowledge are shared among the members as is possible; the size remains fairly consistently at between 15 and 20 members in attendance at any given meeting (although the membership list boasts about 150 members); the organization is somewhat dependent on the members financially (a collection is taken at each meeting which helps to cover the costs of the babysitter and some transportation); participation is certainly valued and expected - organizational efficiency is not necessary, nor is it expected; the members receive interpersonal rewards - fun, sharing, information; although it may seem from the above description that the power within MOMC rests primarily with the two leaders, there are other members who take an active role as well - the power is for the most part shared. This sharing of power can at times become an issue, as noted above, when it is felt that some members are not contributing as much as others. An evaluation of MOMC using this framework would predict that they will continue to function as a collective.

Further investigation of these factors to predict success may be useful to organizations which are in the process of making decisions regarding their goals and purposes. Organizations could use this information to organize in a way that would match their own goals.

A problem that has been identified as being associated with collectives is that of "burn-out". Some community members expressed the concern that Carole and/or Jenny are in danger of "burning-out". This is a very real issue for both of these women. Certainly, the support that they receive from the members is an important source of prevention. A reduction in the overcommitment and intensity as suggested by Freudenburger (1973; cited in Heller et al., 1984, p. 314) may also serve to decrease the

influence of these leaders. Further research would be helpful in understanding ways in which "burn-out" can be prevented in persons who are so intensely committed to a collective. As suggested by Heller et al. (1984, p.314-315), it is also hoped that an evaluation of the progress that has already been made will serve to reduce some of this "burn-out".

There are many ways in which one can view the structures and issues for the members of MOMC. The fact that there is acceptance within the group and the focus is on changing situations as opposed to changing people, that the group maintains a collaborative relationship with professionals in the community, that they have made a decision to remain autonomous despite pressure from the community to become a registered charity, that the current leadership enables the group to function as both a self-help and a social action group, and that the group can be viewed as a collective seem to be some of the factors that have allowed this organization to participate in changes at both the community and the provincial levels. The organizational structure allows for the emergence of both community development and social action activities.

#### *Community Development and Social Action*

Throughout the results of this research, there has been an ongoing dialogue about the advantages and disadvantages of using collaborative and/or confrontative methods to bring about social change. Many participants are greatly in favour of collaboration and view social action as a means of losing credibility and support. Others believe that social action is a means of gaining credibility and power within the community.

Many authors (Alinsky, 1971; Heller & Monahan, 1977; O'Neill & Trickett, 1982) believe that social action is an important means of gaining power and opportunity within a community. Several of those interviewed confirmed this belief. They believe that MOMC has gained credibility because they are in opposition to the status quo. The

group has been able to be heard through their actions and are often being invited to assist in planning and decision-making.

The suggestion has been made in the literature (Alinsky, 1971; Heller & Monahan, 1977; O'Neill & Trickett, 1982) and by those who were interviewed that once some power and credibility have been attained, that negotiation is important as well. Perhaps the synthesis of this apparent dichotomy is in the planning of tactics and strategies. In evaluating which social actions had the most impact in the view of those interviewed, it seems that those that were planned in conjunction with other organizations and had the support of politicians and other community members were the most successful. Perhaps the answer does lie in the planning and collaboration processes that precede and follow any social action. Both confrontation and collaboration are important tools for the members of MOMC. The issue lies in when it is appropriate to use which tactic.

There is some evidence that there is some attitudinal backlash from the community toward MOMC. As noted above, some community members were quite critical of some of the actions of MOMC. Ideally, as suggested by Heller et al. (1984), collaboration with a person who is inside the system is a way to prevent this. Certainly, the contacts which MOMC has made over the years have allowed this process to happen within some organizations. A continuation of that process seems important. Further research regarding the success of social actions may prove useful in evaluating such variables as timing, strategies, tactics, and contacts.

### *Social Movement Theory*

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) view the activities of groups that comprise a social movement as "claims-making activities". They suggest four stages through which a social movement attempts to deal with a social problem. The first stage is when the group(s)

attempt to define the condition that they find offensive or harmful and create a political or public issue by stimulating controversy and making public their assertions. This stage has been undertaken by all of those who were involved in the three-pronged march. The second stage whereby the demands of the group(s) are recognized by an official organization, agency or institution and may be followed by an official investigation, proposals for reform, and the establishment of a forum to respond to the claims of the group has also been completed. Following the implementation of the first stage of the Social Assistance Review Committee report, there were indications that the group's claims had been noted and the process for response was initiated.

Stage three, when further dissatisfaction is expressed by the same or other groups regarding the procedures which have been established to deal with the alleged conditions, is possibly under way at this time. The groups involved in the initial protest are still able to initiate a further insurgency. It is at this point that it is important to note that there is a second direction that this social movement could possibly take besides the fourth stage articulated by Spector and Kitsuse (1987) - that the group(s) reject the official response to their claims or the lack of response and seek to create alternative, parallel or counter-institutions in response. There is, as hypothesized by Mueller (1987), the potential for the movement to be recycled as a resource for a second movement (p. 91). This would indicate that the process was more of a circular one than one which was linear. The final result - the creation of an alternative setting - may still occur, that is yet to be seen. However, this would make an interesting hypothesis with which to focus further research regarding social movement theory.

The actions in which the members of MOMC have been involved with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and the process which evolved around the SARC report yield interesting results which serve to confirm much of what has been hypothesized through social movement theory. The process of the anti-poverty



movement in Ontario and MOMC's actions both within the community and in conjunction with OCAP fits well with current theories of successful social movements.

Jenkins (1985) articulated a theory of resource mobilization for social change which included four important considerations for success of a social movement: mobilization potential, strategic position, strategies of mobilization, and structure of political alignments. He claims that all four of these considerations need to be at a minimum threshold level in order to support a successful insurgency (p. 19).

Jenkins (1985) suggests that groups have more *mobilization potential* - access to resources such as experienced organizers, recognized leaders, a means of communication (e.g., newspaper) and a meeting facility. MOMC, as noted above, has many of these resources available to them - except a means of communication (which has been strongly recommended to the group). OCAP also has many of these resources although in the initial stages of the initiative, they had only recognized leaders. They have developed to a point where they now have an experienced organizer and a means of communication as well as an office which, although meetings are not held there, serves as a focal point for communication and organizing. Both organizations have the potential to mobilize their resources.

The linking together of people through interpersonal bonds and/or social networks into an inclusive network yields a greater potential for mobilization as well. The more cohesive the group, the more potential available for mobilization. Jenkins (1985) suggests that either an emotional commitment as a basis for the receipt of valued social relations or the internalization of a moral code serve to bind members to the group. The view that it is necessary to create a "collective consciousness" is shared by Mueller (1987) and Spector and Kitsuse (1987).

It has been shown in this research that the members of MOMC have these bonds to each other and to the shared ideology of the beliefs and values of the members. This may be the reason that MOMC is seen as "always able to pull their members out".

Another factor involved in the success of a social movement is their *strategic position* - the leverage that a particular group may have. As has been discussed above, the poor have very little with regard to strategic position. They have traditionally been a very powerless group. Their only strategy is to disrupt institutions (Piven & Cloward, 1972). The members of MOMC have sought to change this position and as has been documented above, have increased their credibility, the accountability of service agencies and have engaged in many collaborative activities to further increase their credibility and thus their strategic position. MOMC has some power and influence that they did not have three years ago.

Appropriate *strategies of mobilization* can increase this strategic position. Through networking with other organizations such as the NDP, Unions for the Unemployed, church groups and other organizations, OCAP has been able to gain increased support and resources. This was done initially on an individual basis as some members of the London Union for the Unemployed travelled about the province gaining support. However, once these groups were formed, they became "blocs" as others joined together.

MOMC has also been able to network with other organizations and thus to influence their own strategies of mobilization as well. They have a network of other groups on whom they can call if they wish to initiate a particular action. These groups also contact the members of MOMC if they are planning a social action. A reciprocal relationship has been developed.

According to Jenkins (1985), the *structure of political alignments* - the type of relationships that a social movement can develop with various political groups - are also

important for the successful mobilization of a social movement. OCAP clearly aligned with the NDP party prior to the three-pronged march and also during the election campaign, before the NDP came to power. The political climate at the time was excellent for this particular issue to come forward. The alignments made by both OCAP and MOMC have been important contributions to the movement.

Both OCAP and MOMC have been successful in their participation in the anti-poverty social movement in Ontario. According to Jenkins (1985), this is due in part to their mobilization potential, their strategic position, their strategies, and their political alignments.

This theory of resource mobilization has been confirmed by this research project. Probably the one question that remains is with regard to the strategic position of the group. Disadvantaged people have always had more difficulty mobilizing than other groups because of the lack of resources and the resistance of social structures to allow them to participate. It was extremely important in this particular action then, that all of the groups could come together - the politicians, the churches, unions, service groups - to create enough of a strategic position to follow through with the march and the ensuing political campaign. Disadvantaged groups, it would seem, require this support to be able to successfully mobilize against an opponent. This emphasizes the point made above that networking and alignments with other groups is a crucial part of a successful social movement.

A more in-depth study of this particular social movement (which is really beyond the scope of this thesis) would be a most interesting project for research. Through interviews and documentation (written and videotaped) a clearer picture of the processes involved could emerge.

The theory of Jenkins (1985) is important to all social movement organizations. Further research and confirmation and/or expansion of this theory is important to the

progress of our understanding of social movements. In this research, it could be said that not all of the factors outlined by Jenkins (1985) were at their threshold. The groups initially did not have a strategic position. Only through continued efforts at mobilizing more external resources were they able to reach a point where there was a successful insurgency. This is important information for any group planning to engage in social action activities. Through the understanding of this theory, the potential for success can be built in a systematic way until the threshold of potential is reached.

Certainly, not all of the actions undertaken by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty or by Mothers and Others Making Change have been successful. However, in evaluating the responses of the participants in this research, it would appear that those that were successful involved the choosing of an appropriate strategy and the mobilization of resources through collaboration with other groups with similar goals.

#### *The Success of the Social Movement*

It was proposed earlier, that the criteria for success of a social movement should include those suggested by Jenkins (1985) - changes in the structure of social power through alteration in the content of official decisions or through the way that decisions are made or by the redistribution of socially valuable goods - economic resources, social privilege and/or political power (pp. 19-21). In addition, it was proposed that the criteria proposed by Mueller (1987) as the potential for the movement to be recycled as a resource for a second movement (p. 91) be included in any definition of success. One of the most important outcomes, in the view of those who were interviewed, was the potential for further mobilization through the formation of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. I would suggest that these particular criteria for success be added to those proposed by Jenkins (1985).

It was also very interesting that all those involved in the success of the implementation of the first stage of SARC took credit for its implementation. I do not believe that any one component was solely responsible for the changes that were made. Rather, I think it was the fact that so many, both inside and outside of the system, were working toward the same goal. Perhaps this could also be an indication that there is further potential to mobilize. Because of a past success, all may be more willing in the future to collaborate on a social issue. This fact also stresses the importance of careful planning and collaboration when any social action is undertaken.

#### *Societal Level Issues*

Seidman and Rappaport (1986) state that the "definition of a social problem is time, place, and context bound" (p. 1). The way in which a social problem is defined at any given time impacts significantly on a social movement. There is some evidence in the literature that timing is a most important consideration when contemplating creating social change. Piven and Cloward (1977) noted this in their evaluation of the War Against Poverty. The importance of timing was also noted by the participants in this research. With the current recession and the views of people becoming more conservative and against those on social assistance, the chances for success today would be much less than they were three years ago. However, that does not mean that this social movement should end. Rather, it means that those involved in its process could be mobilizing resources for the next phase of the initiative - when the timing is right again.

A very ambitious researcher may be able to consider the factors involved in this timing through an evaluation of a number of successful social movements. This would be very difficult given the complexity of the factors involved but may yield some important hypotheses regarding timing of social actions.

This concludes the discussion portion of this thesis. The social context has been presented, the methods and framework have been discussed, results have been offered and the discussion is complete. Conclusions will now be offered.

## CONCLUSIONS

As has been consistently presented throughout this research, there are two foci to this research - action and theory. Therefore, the conclusions will be offered first for the action component and then for the theory component.

### Conclusions: Action Research

The results of this research indicate that at an individual level, the organization Mothers and Others Making Change is an empowering organization. Before joining MOMC, the members described themselves as having little or no self-esteem and little self-respect. They believe that they were made to feel guilty, hopeless, powerless and stigmatized because they are on social assistance. The members reported that they have changed since their involvement with the group. They describe increased self-esteem, increased assertiveness, improved coping abilities, hopefulness, a sense of belonging and a belief that they are being supported.

The processes involved in this empowerment were also identified by those interviewed. These include: the availability of positive role models, the favourable appraisal of one's own situation, gaining information about rights and resources, an opportunity to help others, being listened to by peers, being accepted, gaining social support, sharing stories, experiences, problems and solutions, having fun and celebrating, and acting collectively to have their opinions heard.

There is no doubt from the results of this research that the members of MOMC believe that they have been empowered by their participation in the group. MOMC is making change in the lives of the members.

The other question posed by this research is: Is MOMC an empowered organization? The answer to this question is much less clear. There is some evidence to suggest that there may have been some initial changes at the organizational, community, and provincial levels because of the actions of MOMC. However, because of the complex relationships among the various organizations and the various political, social and economic variables, a conclusive answer to this question is not possible.

There have been changes at the organizational level over the past three years. The group has obtained a location for their support and information centre, has gained some credibility in the community and are frequently invited to participate in planning services. Their opinions are sought by the media about issues that involve those who live in poverty. This they have achieved through the process of networking with various organizations, contacting the media, applying for grants and communicating among themselves and community agencies.

At the community level, this research indicates that there have also been changes as a result of the actions of the members of MOMC. There is increased access to food hampers, an increase in public awareness, and increased accountability of some agencies to the consumers. This is seen as a result of political lobbying, public education, confrontation, collaboration, and advocacy activities.

Provincially, through collaboration with other organizations such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, there have also been some changes noted. There is an increased awareness of the public about issues that affect those who live in poverty, increased power and influence, increased resources, and a network working together to create change. This has been accomplished through political lobbying, public education, coalition building, confrontation, collaboration, and participation in task force reviews. MOMC is becoming an empowered organization both at the local and at the provincial level. There is potential for this process to continue.



The information obtained from this research has been shared with the members of Mothers and Others Making Change. They have chosen to use some of the information for their own purposes. They plan to publish a newsletter, make a videotape of both the history of MOMC and poverty issues, to share their history with newer members, to increase their communication with the general public, other agencies and among the members, to further discuss fundraising ideas, to invite speakers to the group and to further review their relationship with provincial organizations.

### **Conclusions: The Theoretical Research**

Many definitions of empowerment have been proposed. The definition that most closely resembles that which emerged from this research is the one proposed by Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988):

"Psychological empowerment may be generally described as the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in, the public domain... (as) a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to matters of social policy and social change." (pp. 724-726)

This definition is congruent with the one which has emerged from this research. The components of the definition need to include the belief in one's own strengths and competencies, the willingness to use those attributes in a public way to create change *and* to take action on new-found beliefs in order to gain control over one's own life. These are all important components of a definition of empowerment.

The literature indicates that those factors involved in the empowerment process for participants in self-help groups include: social support, the helper-therapy principle, and gaining a sense of community. Less emphasis was placed on the fun and enjoyment that results from involvement in a community, the availability of positive role models

and the favourable appraisal of one's own situation, the sharing of stories, experiences, problems, and solutions, the gaining of knowledge about rights and resources and the experience of collective action. For the members of MOMC, all of these factors were important aspects of their involvement in this self-help group.

Lord and Farlow (1990) outlined a process of empowerment as incorporating a personal crisis or motivational trigger, the learning that they have a voice and that people will listen and understand, a change in either social or environmental context and the presence of a supportive, inspiring and therefore, significant person serving as a bridge to peers. Involvement in community life was also cited as key to the growth of empowerment. The process of involvement at MOMC can be seen to closely parallel that process described by Lord and Farlow (1990). Further investigation of this process through tapping multiple resources would yield some further insight into this process.

At the organizational level, insight was gained into some of the variables which may influence the success of a group such as MOMC. These include: a situational focus, collaboration with professionals, shared and varied leadership, and the availability of resources within the group. It is unclear with this last factor, especially with regard to funding, where the solution to this issue may lie. The suggestion is made both to fund - which may lead to the loss of autonomy - and to not fund - which may lead to the dissolution of the organization. This is a difficult issue which requires further investigation.

The results of this research indicate that there may be some solutions to this problem of funding. The optimal solution would be for MOMC to become self-supporting through fund-raising activities. This is possibly happening at the present time with the implementation of a social club every Saturday evening. However, if this does not raise enough funds to sustain the organization, the availability of resources from the government and distributed through an independent board may assist the

development of special interest groups such as MOMC. The funding which the group currently receives from PLURA is also a positive source of funding in that the accountability for the spending of that money is minimal. Probably the ideal would be a combination of self-supporting funds for social action and community development activities with contributions from an outside source for the purpose of maintenance of the group.

The issue of confrontation versus collaboration which arose repeatedly throughout the research is also one that has been debated at length. It would appear that both tactics are important at different times. The important issue for organizations though is to know which tactics may be best in which situation. Again, further research with regard to this issue could be beneficial.

The current state of social movement theory would indicate that there may be a circular, as opposed to a linear process, which can be used to evaluate the progress of a social movement. Spector and Kitsuse (1987) hypothesize that there are four stages to a social movement. However, if one were also to consider that the resources from one social movement can be recycled for another one, this process could be viewed as a circular one. Further investigation would certainly be warranted.

Jenkins' (1985) theory of resource mobilization was confirmed by this research. The success of a movement can be assessed according to the potential for mobilization, the strategic position, strategies of mobilization, and the structure of political alignments. This theory is particularly important to organizations planning to initiate any social movement because it offers suggestions about means to achieve success. A more in-depth investigation of this particular social movement may contribute to this theory, especially with regard to disadvantaged populations.

The criteria for success of a social movement defined by Jenkins (1985) include: changes in the structure of social power through alteration in the content of official

decisions or through the way that decisions are made or by the redistribution of socially valuable goods - economic resources, social privilege and/or political power (pp. 19-21). The criteria proposed by Mueller (1987) as the potential for the movement to be recycled as a resource for a second movement (p. 91) can also be included in any definition of success. One of the most important outcomes, in the view of those who were interviewed, was the potential for further mobilization through the formation of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. I would suggest that this particular criterion for success be added to those proposed by Jenkins (1985).

This thesis has been an evaluation of the organization Mothers and Others Making Change from both an action and a theory perspective. The basic questions to be answered were: *Is MOMC an empowering organization?* and *Is MOMC an empowered organization?* The answers to these questions have been obtained. MOMC as a self-help organization does empower the members. MOMC as a social action organization is becoming empowered.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW FORMAT FOR INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF MOMC

1. Explain research purpose.
2. Can you tell me about the organization MOMC? How long have you been involved?
3.
  - a. What has MOMC done for you? What have you done for MOMC?
  - b. What do you see as the most important activities in which MOMC is involved?
  - c. Which activities have been most useful to you?  
Any others that are important?
  - d. Since your involvement with MOMC, have you become involved with other community groups?
  - e. Have there been changes in you since your involvement with MOMC?
  - f. What kind of changes? How has that affected your life? (Probe - especially socially?)
4.
  - a. What has been your involvement with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty?
  - b. What has that experience been like for you?
5.
  - a. Have you been involved in any province-wide/local social action activities such as protests, marches, letter writing, demonstrations? Against whom?
  - b. For each experience:  
How was this experience for you?  
How did you feel about your involvement?  
Did you agree with the purpose/aim/goal of the protest?  
Do you believe that any changes came about as a result of your group's actions?
  - c. Do you believe that these actions were useful (i.e. put pressure on those against whom you were demonstrating)?
  - d. Do you believe that there have been changes in this community as a result of the actions of MOMC? What kinds of changes? How have these changes affected you?
6.
  - a. What are your feelings right now about poverty?
  - b. Is this the way you used to think about poverty?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW FORMAT FOR MEMBERS OF THE ONTARIO COALITION AGAINST POVERTY

1. Explain purpose of research.
2.
  - a. Can you tell me about the organization?
  - b. What is the philosophy of OCAP?
  - c. What are the goals, both short-term and long-term?
  - d. How is it organized? (socially/structurally)
    - What resources are available for funding and support?
    - Who is responsible for organizing the activities of the group?
    - How are decisions made? Is this how it happens?
    - With whom is the organization linked?
3.
  - a. I am particularly interested in hearing about the protests in which MOMC was involved. In what activities have you been involved in which MOMC was also involved, since joining OCAP?
  - b. For each activity:
    - What was the response of the opposition?
    - Were these actions useful?
    - Do you believe that this resulted in any changes in how decisions are made, what decisions are made, gains for the members of your organization?
  - c. Were these actions useful?
4. Do you believe that OCAP is an influential part of politics in Ontario today?
5. What changes do you believe have been made as a result of the actions of OCAP?
6. How do you feel about being a member of OCAP?
7. How do you feel people view your organization?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW FORMAT FOR NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICIANS

1. Explain purpose of research.
2. Can you tell me about your party's involvement in CAP and SARC?
3. How did your organization first come to be involved with MAP?
4. What was the role of the NDP in this action?
5. What changes have you noticed as a result of the actions of CAP?
6. Do you believe that CAP was central in the implementation of the SARC report?
7. Has the NDP been involved in any other social action activities with CAP/OCAP?

If so...repeat questions 4,5 & 6 above.

If not...Is there a reason that your organization has not had further involvement?

Are you still involved with OCAP and/or ISARC as a resource for policy planning? Does your party intend to work with OCAP/ISARC in the future?

8. Have you heard of the organization MOMC?

What have been your impressions about the organization?

Do you believe that this organization has the potential to guide policy for the NDP?

If yes - in what way?

If no - would you consider looking into this in the future?

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW FORMAT FOR LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL SOCIAL SERVICE RESOURCE PEOPLE

1. Explain purpose of research.
2. a. Are you aware of the activities of  
MOMC?  
MAP?  
OCAP?  
ISARC?  
b. Can you tell me what your understanding of these organizations is?  
c. How do you feel about these organizations?
3. a. Of what actions that these groups (individually or collectively) have taken are you aware?  
b. What did you think about these actions?
4. a. Do you believe that the actions taken by these groups have had an influence on decisions in this province (community)? In what way?  
b. Do you believe that these organizations have had an impact on the way social services are delivered in this province (community)?  
c. Do you believe that these organizations made any gains either through resources, political power or privileges?
5. What impact has this had?



APPENDIX E  
CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET

DATE:

PLACE:

INTERVIEWEE:

BACKGROUND: AGE \_\_\_\_\_ SEX \_\_\_\_\_ OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_.

- I. What was the general impression of the interview?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- II. What was the opinion of the interviewee about each of the target issues for which he/she was approached (using conceptual framework)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- III. Was there anything else that came out of the interview that is important?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- IV. Are there changes that need to be made for the next interview (in approach taken, questions asked)?

APPENDIX F

re: Thesis

Mothers and Others Making Change:

Empowerment through self-help and social action

We, the undersigned, have read the above-named document.

We agree that the statements made by us and about us may be included in the text of the document.

Date: May 1<sup>st</sup> 1992 Signed: Carole Silliker

Carole Silliker

Witness: L. Killebrew

President

Mothers and Others Making Change

Date: May 1<sup>st</sup> 1992 Signed: Jennifer Myers

Jennifer Myers

Witness: L. Killebrew

Vice-President

Mothers and Others Making Change

## **REFERENCES**

- Adamson, N., Briskin, L. & McPhail, M. (1988). *Feminist organizing for change: The contemporary women's movement in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Alinsky, S.D. (1971). *Rules for radicals*. New York: Random House.
- Back on track: First report of the advisory group on new social assistance legislation*. March, 1991. Queen's Printer, Toronto, Ontario.
- Belle, D. (1982). *Lives in stress*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.
- Borkman, T.J. (1991). Introduction to the special issue. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(5), 643-650.
- Borkman, T. (1984). Mutual self-help groups: Strengthening the selectively unsupportive personal and community networks of their members. In A. Gartner & F. Riessman (Eds.) *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press Inc.
- Chavis, D., & Wandersman, A. (1990). Sense of community in the urban environment: A catalyst for participation and community development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 55-81.
- Cherniss, C., & Cherniss, D.S. (1987). Professional involvement in self-help groups for parents of high-risk newborns. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 5(4), 435-444.
- Chesler, M.A. (1991). Participatory action research with self-help groups: An alternative paradigm for inquiry and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(5), 757-768.
- Cloward, R.A., & Piven, F.F. (1972). *The politics of turmoil: Essays on poverty, race and the urban crisis*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Cooperrider, D., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 1, 129-169.
- Dobelstein, A.W. (1987). *Examining poverty: A review of studies of poverty and poverty programs, 1960-1985*. Greensboro: North Carolina Poverty Project.
- Egan, C., Gardner, L. & Vashti Persad, J. (1988). The politics of transformation: struggles with race, class and sexuality in the March 8th Coalition. In F. Cunningham, S. Findlay, M. Kadar, A. Lennon, & E. Silva (Eds.) *Social movements/social change: The politics and practice of organizing*. Toronto: Between The Lines.
- Ehrenreich, B., & Piven, F. (1984). The feminization of poverty. In I. Howe (Ed.), *Alternatives: Proposals for America from the democratic left*. New York: Random House Inc.

- Field, F. (1982). *Poverty and politics: The inside story of the CPAG campaigns in the 1970's*. London: Heinemann.
- Fisher, R. (1984). Neighbourhood organizing: Lessons from the past. *Social Policy*, Summer, 9-16.
- Florin, P. & Wandersman, A. (1990). An introduction to citizen participation, voluntary organizations, and community development: Insights for empowerment through research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 41-54.
- Gamson, W. (1975). *The strategy of social protest*. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press.
- Gartner, A., & Riessman, F. (1984). *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Gelb, J. (1987). Social movement "success": A comparative analysis of feminism in the United States and the United Kingdom. In M.F. Katzenstein, & C.M. Mueller (Eds.) *The women's movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, political opportunity, and public policy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gidron, B., Chesler, M.A., & Chesney, B.K. (1991). Cross-cultural perspectives on self-help groups: Comparison between participants and nonparticipants in Israel and the United States. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(5), 667-681.
- Gil, D.G. (1987). Social sciences, human survival, development and liberation. In K. Westhues (Ed.), *Basic principles for social sciences in our time*. Waterloo: University of St. Jerome's Press.
- Goals, purposes and objectives*. (1988). Kitchener: Mothers and Others Making Change.
- Goldklang, D.S. (1991). Research workshop on methodological issues in evaluating preventive interventions using mutual support. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(5), 789-795.
- Goldstein, R., & Sachs, S. (1983). *Applied poverty research*. New York: Rowman and Allenhead Publications.
- Gottlieb, B.H. (1983). Social support as a focus for integrative research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 3, 278-287.
- Harrington, M. (1984). *The new American poverty*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Heller, K., & Monahan, J. (1977). *Psychology and community change*. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press.
- Heller, K., Price, R., Reinhartz, S., Riger, S., & Wandersman, A. (1984). *Psychology and community change*. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press.
- Herman, R.D. (1982). Social action organization participation and personal change in the poor: Part 1. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 9, 573-586.
- Herman, R.D. (1983). Social action organization participation and personal change in the poor: Part 11. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 10, 355-375.

- Holman, B. (1987). Research from the underside. *British Journal of Social Work*, 17, 669-683.
- Hurley, D. (1988). Getting help from helping. *Psychology Today*, January, 1988.
- Initiative: The Self-help Newsletter*, Winter, 1989. 5(2).
- Jenkins, J.C. (1985). *The politics of insurgency: The farm worker movement in the 1960's*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jourard, S.M. (1971). *The transparent self*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.
- Katz, M B. (1989). *The undeserving poor: From the war on poverty to the war on welfare*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Kieffer, C. (1984). Citizen empowerment: A developmental perspective. *Prevention In Human Services*, 3(2/3), 9-36.
- Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, October 10, 1988.
- Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, January 4, 1991.
- Knoke, D. (1988). Incentives in collective action organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 53, 311-329.
- Kurtz, L., & Chambon, A. (1987). Comparison of self-help groups for mental health. *Health and Social Work*, Fall, 1987. 275-283.
- Lader, L. (1979). *Power on the left: American radical movements since 1946*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Lavoie, F. (1984). A new model of interaction between the professional and self-help groups. In A. Gartner & F. Riessman. (Eds.) *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press Inc.
- Levine, M. (1988). An analysis of mutual assistance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 16(2), 167-183.
- Levy, L. (1984). Issues in research and evaluation. In A. Gartner & F. Riessman. (Eds.) *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Lord, J., & McKillop Farlow, D. (1990). A study of personal empowerment: implications for health promotion. *Health Promotion*, 29(2), 2-8.
- Lord, J., Schnarr, A., & Hutchison, P. (1987). The voice of the people: Qualitative research and the needs of the consumer. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 6(2), 25-35.

- Meissen, G.J., Mason, W.C., & Gleason, D.F. (1991). Understanding the attitudes and intentions of future professionals toward self-help. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *19*(5), 699-714.
- Morrison, S. (1989). *Surmounting the barriers: Towards an understanding of the factors involved in success for single mothers on social assistance*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University.
- Mothers And Others Making Change: Purpose, goals and objectives*. (1988).
- Mowrer, O.H. (1984). The mental health professionals and mutual help programs: Cooptation or cooperation? In A. Gartner & F. Riessman (Eds.) *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press Inc.
- Mueller, C.M. (1987). Collective consciousness, identity transformation, and the rise of women in public office in the United States. In M.F. Katzenstein, & C.M. Mueller (Eds.) *The women's movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, political opportunity, and public policy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Neighbour to neighbour, voices for change: Report of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition: Hearing on poverty and welfare reform*. September, 1990.
- O'Neill, P., & Trickett, E.J. (1982). *Community consultation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Patton, M. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Perkins, D.D., Florin, P., Rich, R., Wandersman, A., & Chavis, D.M. (1990). Participation and the social and physical environment of residential blocks: Crime and community context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *18*(1), 83-115.
- Piven, F.F. & Cloward, R.A. (1977). *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Powell, T.J., & Cameron, M.J. (1991). Self-help research and the public mental health system. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *19*(5), 797-805.
- Prestby, J.E., Wandersman, A., Florin, P., Rich, R., & Chavis, D. (1990). Benefits, costs, incentive management and participation in voluntary organizations: A means to understanding and promoting empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *18*(1), 117-149.
- Price, R.H., & Cherniss, C. (1977). Training for a new profession: Research as social action. *Professional Psychology*, *8*, 222-230.
- Price, R.H. (1990). Whither participation and empowerment? *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *18*(1), 163-167.
- Prilleltensky, I. (in press). Empowerment in mainstream psychology: Legitimacy, obstacles, and possibilities. *Canadian Psychology*.

- Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, (1981). 9, 1-25.
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: Introduction to the issue. *Prevention in Human Services*, 3, 1-7.
- Rappaport, J. (1986). Collaborating for empowerment: Creating the language of mutual help. In H.C. Boyte & F. Riessman (Eds.) *The new populism: The politics of empowerment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15, 121-148.
- Riessman, F. (1988). Professionals and self-help: A dialectical relationship. *Initiative: The Self-Help Newsletter*, Winter, 1989. Vol. 5, No. 2.
- Riessman, F. (1990a). Restructuring help: A human services paradigm for the 1990's. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(2), 221-230.
- Riessman, F. (1990b). The new self-help backlash. *Social Policy*, 21(1), 42-50.
- Riger, S. (1984). Vehicles for empowerment: The case of feminist movement organizations. *Prevention In Human Services*, 3(2/3), 99-117.
- Roberts, L.J., Luke, D.A., Rappaport, J., Seidman, E., Toro, P.A., & Reischl, T.M. (1991). Charting uncharted terrain: A behavioral observation system for mutual help groups. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(5), 715-737.
- Ross, D., & Shillington, R. (1989). *The Canadian fact book on poverty - 1989*. Ottawa: Canadian Council On Social Development.
- Rubin, L. (1985). *Intimate strangers*. New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers.
- Sarason, S.B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, H. (1984). *Working your way to the bottom: The feminization of poverty*. Boston: Pandora Press.
- Seidman, E., & Rappaport, J. (Eds.). (1986). *Redefining social problems*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Self-Help Reporter: The Newsletter of the National Self-Help Clearinghouse*, Summer/Fall, 1989.
- Simon, B. (1988). The feminization of poverty: A call for primary prevention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 9, 6-17.
- Spector, M., & Kitsuse, J. (1987). *Constructing social problems*. New York: De Gruyter.

- Staggenborg, S. (1989). Stability and innovation in the women's movement: A comparison of two movement organizations. *Social Problems*, 36(1), 75-92.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications Inc. *The other Ontario: A report on poverty in Ontario*. The Ontario New Democratic Party Caucus, June, 1984.
- Transitions: Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee*. (1988). Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Vanderslice, V.J. (1984). Empowerment: A definition in process. *Human Ecology Forum*, 4 (1), 2-3.
- Wollert, R.W. (1986). Psychosocial helping processes in a heterogeneous sample of self-help groups. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 5(1), 63-76.
- Wollert, R., Knight, B., & Levy, L. (1984). Make Today Count: A Collaborative Model for Professionals and Self-Help Groups. In A. Gartner & F. Riessman. (Eds.). *The self-help revolution*. New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc.
- Wollert, R. (1986). Psychosocial helping processes in a heterogeneous sample of self-help groups. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 5(1), 63-76.
- Wollert, R.W. & the Self-Help Research Team. (1987). The Self-Help Clearinghouse concept: An evaluation of one program and its implications for policy and practice. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15(4), 491-508.
- Zimmerman, M.A. (1990). Taking aim at empowerment research: On the distinction between individual and psychological conceptions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 169-177.
- Zimmerman, M.A., & Rappaport, J. (1988). Citizen participation, perceived control, and psychological empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 16(5), 725-750.